



Meeting: **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 4 November 2025 at 2.00 pm**

Location: **Sparkenhoe Committee Room, County Hall, Glenfield**

Contact: **Damien Buckley (Tel: 0116 305 0183)**

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Membership

Mr. M. Bools CC (Chairman)

Mr. J. Boam CC	Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC	Mr. B. Piper CC
Mrs. L. Danks CC	Mr. K. Robinson CC
Emily Greasley	Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC	Canon. C. Shoyer
Mr. J. McDonald CC	Mr. C. A. Smith CC
Adina Murataj	Mrs D. Taylor CC
Mr. D. Page CC	

AGENDA

<u>Item</u>	<u>Report by</u>
1. Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2025.	(Pages 3 - 12)
2. Question Time.	
3. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).	
4. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.	
5. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.	
6. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance	



with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

7. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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| 8. | Children and Family Services Department. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 13 - 34) |
| 9. | Inclusion in Leicestershire Schools. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 35 - 50) |
| 10. | Leicestershire's Response to Tackling Child Criminal Exploitation. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 51 - 56) |
| 11. | Leicestershire Adoption Agency Statutory Report 2024-2025. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 57 - 94) |
| 12. | Fostering Annual Report 2024-25. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 95 - 126) |
| 13. | Annual Report of the Virtual School 2024-2025. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 127 - 172) |
| 14. | Date of future meetings. | | |

Meetings of the Committee in 2026 are scheduled to take place at 14:00 on the following days:

20 January 2026
3 March 2026
2 June 2026
1 September 2026
3 November 2026

15. Any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent.



Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 2 September 2025.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Bools CC (in the Chair)

Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC
Mrs. L. Danks CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC
Mr. D. Page CC

Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. B. Piper CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. C. A. Smith CC
Mrs D. Taylor CC

In attendance

Mr. C. Pugsley CC – Lead Member for Children and Families
Canon. C. Shoyer – Church of England Representative (online)
Dr. J. Bloxham CC – Scrutiny Commissioner (Agenda Item 8)
Mr. A. Innes CC – Scrutiny Commissioner (Agenda Item 8)
Mr. M. Mullaney CC – Scrutiny Commissioner (Agenda Item 8)

17. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2025.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

18. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

19. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

20. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

21. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

22. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

23. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 35.

24. Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) Programme Summary and High Needs Block Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided a summary of the work and impact of the Transforming SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme. It sets out the progress since the update considered by the Committee on 5 September 2024, programme impact and next steps, as well as an overview of the current High Needs Block financial position. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

The Scrutiny Commissioners were welcomed to the meeting for this item. The invitation was issued following a discussion on the TSIL Programme and the High Needs Block at the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 9 June 2025.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that he was confident with the direction of travel set out within the report. The Service continued to operate within a challenging SEND environment and demand had spiked again this year. National reforms to children's social care would be announced in the Autumn which would then to be introduced locally. Despite continued challenges, he stated that the Department had managed to make progress, reduce backlogs and improve timeliness.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding a £6,000 per pupil notional SEND funding amount, which had remained unchanged since its introduction in 2014 despite rising costs and increasing demand for SEND provision, the Director stated that if the Department for Education were to review the figure it would be expected to increase to around £10,500 per pupil.
- (ii) A question was raised relating to whether national reforms to children's social care were likely to have an impact on demand for EHCP's. The Director stated that it was not clear what would be set out within the reforms. Following announcement of the reforms in the Autumn, primary legislation would be required and there would then need to be a period of implementation both nationally and locally. It was therefore unlikely that the reforms would have an immediate impact on growth. As challenges in this area continued, the Department would continue to work with mainstream schools in order to further develop the strategy for supporting inclusion within mainstream schools, wherever possible. Members noted that this work would be undertaken through the Change Programme Partnership.
- (iii) With regards to the timeliness of the assessment process for EHCP assessment requests, performance in Leicestershire remained below the national average. The Director stated that process improvements had enabled the SENA service to reduce backlogs and improve timeliness. Members noted that a lack of capacity for educational psychologists had contributed towards delays in the assessment

process. The Department had developed a strategy for utilising alternative professionals to undertake elements of the assessment process, whilst educational psychologists would oversee the case. Work had also been undertaken with NHS partners to develop support for children who were waiting for a health assessment. The Department would also consider whether artificial intelligence (AI) could be utilised by the SENA service in order to reduce the time and resource required to process EHCP assessment information.

- (iv) The Department would aim to improve the understanding of the assessment process through improved communication with parents and schools. In addition to this, the Department would undertake work in order to build the confidence of parents and schools to consider whether a child could be successful within a mainstream school without an EHCP in place. Members noted that schools could use a range of inclusion support without the need for an EHCP. Improving knowledge and understanding of the assessment process and the different levels of support available for children could reduce the demand of requests for needs assessments.
- (v) Members noted that the Department continued to await an inspection under a revised SEND Local Area Inspection Framework. The Framework had been introduced by the Government in April 2024. As national reforms to children's social care would be announced in the Autumn, it was uncertain as to whether or not Ofsted would continue to deliver inspections under this Framework.
- (vi) With regards to complaints received by the SENA service, which had reduced by 70% from the previous year, the Director clarified that of the 446 complaints had been received relating to the Service, 72% had resulted in a fault found. The main themes of complaints received by the Service were complaints relating to decision making and delays in providing a service, as well as complaints relating to communication.
- (vii) Members noted that the Department had undertaken work in order to increase capacity within internal specialist schools as the places could often be delivered at a considerably lower cost than utilising independent schools. The Department would aim to further increase the number of internal specialist places through the development of an area based special school. However, the Director stated that increase levels of demand for specialist places continued to impact the supply of internal places.
- (viii) In response to concern raised regarding funding and demand pressures, members were assured that the Department would continue to undertake work in order to slow demand, improve the overall High Needs deficit position, and consider strategies for further improving internal service performance and inclusive practice across the SEND system. Members noted that rises in demand reinforced that the SEND system remained unsustainable. Uncertainty regarding what would be included within the White Paper proposed for release in Autumn 2025 was expected to continue to fuel demand until there was more clarity over proposed changes. The Director agreed that a report to update on progress with regards to SEND and inclusion, and the High Needs Block financial position, would be presented to the Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the summary of the work and impact of the Transforming SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme, the progress since the update considered by the Committee on 5 September 2024, programme impact and next steps, as well as an overview of the current High Needs Block financial position, be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with an update on SEND and inclusion, and the High Needs Block financial position, at a future meeting.

25. Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024-25.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided a summary of the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2024/25. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 9", is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families stated all complaints received by the Department were of great importance and provided the opportunity for improvements in service delivery. He stated that he was regularly briefed on the main themes of the complaints and compliments received by the Department, as well as the work undertaken as a result. He assured members of his confidence that the Department would continue with its focus on delivering timely and clear communication to families, incorporating the feedback within both complaints and compliments.

In introducing the report, the Director stated that there were a number of errors in the data presented within the cover report. A member commented that the number of errors had made it difficult for the report to be fully understood. As a result of this, the Director agreed that the correct data would be published following the meeting.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Members noted that complaint cases had been utilised in order to make improvements within services. It was suggested that anonymous case studies could be provided alongside reports in order to illustrate how improvements had been undertaken. The Director agreed that case studies would be included with the next Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report.
- (ii) A question was raised as to whether members could be provided with information relating to cases whereby fault was found by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman following an investigation. The Director agreed to provide members with this information following the meeting.
- (iii) Concern was raised that only 58% of complaints at Stage 1 had been responded to within the statutory maximum period of 20 working days. The Director advised that there were a number of factors which could affect the length of time taken to respond to a complaint. The complexity of the case was often a factor for delay, in addition to the amount of time taken to arrange meetings between officers and complainants. Members were assured that regular communication with complainants continued to be undertaken throughout the complaint process, and this included an explanation for any delay in response.

- (iv) Members noted that service users were asked to provide feedback on services. This was either conducted via a survey or through conversations during and after intervention. The voice of children and families continued to form an essential element of the Department's continuous improvement plan.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the summary of the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2024/25, be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to publish correct data relating to errors contained within the report.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to include case studies relating to the outcome of complaints, as part of a future annual report.
- (d) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with information relating to complaints which had been investigated by the Local Government and Social care Ombudsman.

26. Children in Need of Help and Protection.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of work in the Children and Family Department in relation to children within Leicestershire that require Help and Protection. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the Service continued to undertake vital and complex work in order to ensure that the correct support was provided to children at the correct time.

In response to a question regarding access to the Disabled Children's Service, the Director advised that the Council had specific responsibilities to ensure that the needs of a disabled children were met. Families and professionals could make a referral for any child through the Council's Front Door. The First Response Team would then undertake an initial assessment in order to determine the correct level of support for a child. Support services would be provided by different services from across the Department, such as the Disabled Children's Service or the Targeted Early Help Team. Members noted that both families and professionals would be involved in those assessments.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of work in undertaken the Children and Family Department in relation to children within Leicestershire that require Help and Protection be noted.

27. Leicestershire Music Overview Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided the latest achievements and impact, as well as the funding and governance arrangements for Leicestershire Music, as the Lead organisation for the Leicestershire Music Hub. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Members were pleased with the work undertaken by the Service in delivering music education programmes which benefited children in a number of ways such as developing creativity, cognitive skills, social connections, and overall wellbeing. The Director agreed that the Committee would be provided with an invitation to Leicestershire Music performances and that a report on the work delivered by the Service would be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.
- (ii) In response to concern relating to funding, the Director assured members that the Service would continue to deliver music education programmes but that some efficiencies would need to be undertaken. The Service was in receipt of a core funding grant which had not increased for the 2025-26 academic year and had only increased by 4.61% since 2015-16. In addition to this, the Local Government Pay Award for 2024/25 was unfunded and would have an impact on the budget. In order to make efficiencies, the Service had undertaken a staffing restructure and could, as the Hub lead, reduce the amount of funding it provided to partner organisations. Members noted that reducing the amount of funding provided to partners could have an impact on specialist services which delivered programmes to groups of children such as those with SEND.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the latest achievements and impact, as well as the funding and governance arrangements for Leicestershire Music, as the Lead organisation for the Leicestershire Music Hub, be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with an invitation to Leicestershire Music performances.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with a report on the Leicestershire Music service annually.

28. Quarter 1 2025-26 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period April to June 2025 (Quarter 1). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) A question was raised regarding the requirement for additional schools and school places. The Director stated that housing development programmes across the County continued to increase demand for school places. The Department would continue to utilise developer contributions so that the financial burden would not affect the Council's capital budget. In addition to this, it was developing a School Place Strategy which would outline capacity and sufficient challenges. Members would continue to be invited to attend briefings on school places relevant to their localities.
- (ii) It was expected that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) could impact school place sufficiency. LGR would require two-tier areas, such as Leicestershire, and neighbouring small unitary areas to set out plans for a joint programme of

devolution and local government reorganisation. It was not yet clear what the outcome of reorganisation in Leicestershire would be. However, as all local authorities had a duty to provide a sufficient number of school places, a strategy to review school places would be required as part of any reorganisation model.

- (iii) With regards to the number of children who were electively home educated (EHE), the Director stated that this number continued to increase in line with a national trend. The Department continued to monitor the reasons for EHE and it worked with families to support their decision. The Director agreed to provide members with an overview of the reasons for EHE as part of a future report relating to Inclusion.
- (iv) A question was asked regarding a reduction in the number of eligible children which took up their Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) offer. The Director stated that there was a challenge relating to there being an insufficient number of places for children with SEND in two particular areas. In order to address the issue, the Service continued to work with parents in order to access alternative placements and would consider how in-house nurseries could be made more inclusive. A social media campaign was being delivered which encouraged parents to check their FEEE entitlement and the offer was also being advertised within Family Hubs.
- (v) In response to concern relating to the number of fixed term suspensions, the Director assured members that the Department provided an outreach service which worked with children and families through alternative provision, as well as exploring ways in which children could be supported back into school and prevent further suspensions. Members noted that additional work in this area would be delivered through the SEND Investment Fund.
- (vi) Members noted that there were a limited number of post-16 pathways for children and young people. Members noted that the Department had recruited a post-16 service manager who would evaluate the post-16 offer across the county. It was anticipated that more entry-level courses, supported internships and vocational opportunities would be required to ensure an inclusive post-16 offer.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period April to June 2025 (Quarter 1), be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to include a breakdown of reasons for which parents had chosen to electively home educate children within a future report relating to inclusion.

29. Draft Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 2024-25.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought views on the draft Yearly Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership (LRSCP) for 2024-25. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Family Services emphasised that the reported demonstrated both the scale and the seriousness of safeguarding and highlighted the importance of early intervention.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) The Director explained that local authorities and statutory safeguarding partners had both a statutory obligation and a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children. This included the reporting of safeguarding concerns. Elected Members also had a duty as corporate parents. In terms of the wider responsibility for safeguarding, the Department regularly undertook work through safeguarding partnerships on recognising the signs of abuse and campaigns focussed on helping communities to identify children at risk of abuse.
- (ii) In response to a question regarding group based sexual exploitation, the Director advised that it could not be possible to state that such activity was not taking place at any given time. However, members were assured that whilst the Director was not aware of any ongoing investigations or high-profile incidents relating to large scale grooming gangs in Leicestershire, robust methods of identification and monitoring continued to be utilised in order to respond to instances whereby exploitation was suspected and to support children at risk of exploitation.
- (iii) With regards to health information sessions which had been delivered by doctors and other healthcare professional within Family Hubs, members noted that the sessions had been piloted within a specific location in order to prevent unnecessary GP referrals relating to specific health issues. The sessions had a positive outcome, but it was not clear whether the sessions had been delivered in Family Hubs in additional locations. Members noted that the Director would discuss with the Service the approach for ongoing delivery.
- (iv) Concern was raised regarding the sustainability of funding for the Partnership's work, as a shortfall had been reported. This shortfall had been made up from reserves. The Director stated that funding arrangements for the Partnership continued to be reviewed on an annual basis. Members received assurance that as part of the local implementation of national reforms to children's social care, the Department would review whether service delivery could be undertaken more efficiently. If savings could not be delivered within the Department, negotiations with partners regarding contributions would take place in order to address the shortfall in funding.
- (v) Members noted that a Race, Ethnicity and Excellence Forum (REEF) had been established in order to ensure that the best level of support was being provided to children from Black, Asian or Multi Ethnic backgrounds. The additional safeguarding needs of this group needed to be considered as a result of intersectionality, racism or discrimination. The forum allowed staff across the Department to bring cases to discuss in order to ensure the needs of black, Asian and Multi Ethnic children and young people were being fully considered and to analyse broader issues relating to race which could impact on safeguarding children.
- (vi) In response to a question asked of the Lead Member for Children and Families regarding his support for the work undertaken by the REEF, he stated that his most important priority as designated Lead Member for Children and Young People was that all children, regardless of background, were safeguarded. He assured members that he supported the best interests of all children and that this was fundamental in ensuring that he and the Director of Children and Family Services delivered their safeguarding responsibilities.

- (vii) With regards to the Partnership's priorities for 2025-27, members noted that work focusing on child exploitation would be delivered as part of work to be delivered as part of Harm Outside the Home. The Director stated that this would be made clearly within the final version of the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 2024-25.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft yearly report assessing the impact of the work undertaken in 2024/25 on safeguarding outcomes for children in Leicestershire and Rutland be noted.
- (b) That the views expressed by the Committee would be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 12 September 2025.

30. Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided a summary and contents of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report for 2024 – 2025. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 14', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding the number of children which had participated in the review process, members noted that the number had remained relatively high over recent years. The Director highlighted that 92% of children contributed to their review, which represented a slight decrease from the 2023/24, when 93.056% of children contributed. The participation rate in 2022/23 was 90.84%.
- (ii) A question was asked of the Lead Member for Children and Families, relating to the commitment of the IRO in strengthening practice around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in terms of developing knowledge and understanding and becoming more culturally competent in practice. The Lead Member stated that he was focussed on ensuring that the best quality of service was provided to all children.
- (iii) Members noted that the Department was focussed on ensuring the correct support for children, and that in some cases this would result in individual decisions being made for individual children. The Service would continue to deliver the best support available for different groups of children and ensure that all children were kept safe from harm.

RESOLVED:

That the summary and contents of the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report for 2024 – 2025, be noted.

31. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 4 November at 14:00.

2.00 - 4.26 pm
02 September 2025

CHAIRMAN



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 4 NOVEMBER 2025

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

REPORT OF THE
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the work of the Children and Family Services Department.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children Act 2004 requires every upper tier local authority to appoint a Director of Children's Services (DCS) and designate a Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS).
3. The DCS and LMCS are appointed for the purposes of discharging the education and children's social services functions of the local authority. The functions for which they are responsible are set out in section 18(2) of the Children Act 2004. This includes (but is not limited to) responsibility for children and young people receiving education or children's social care services in their area and all children looked after by the local authority or in custody (regardless of where they are placed).
4. Working together to Safeguard Children 2023 sets out the legislative requirements placed on individual services to safeguard children, provides a framework for the three local safeguarding partners (the local authority, clinical commissioning group and the chief officer of police for a police area, any part of which falls within the local authority area) to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children.
5. Whilst it is parents and carers who have primary care for their children, local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties: Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the local authority to provide services to children in need in their area, regardless of where they are found; Section 47 of the same Act requires local authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.

Department Overview

6. The vision of the Children and Family Services Department is for Leicestershire to be the best place for all children, young people, and their families. This vision is underpinned by the mission statement that children and young people in Leicestershire are safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential, feel nurtured, have a sense of belonging; feel loved and supported to succeed.
7. The Children and Family Services Department Plan 2024-2026 sets out three key ambitions for the Department, to:
 - Help every child to get the best possible start in life and build strong foundations;
 - Children and young people can be safe, both at home and in the community and have a sense of belonging;
 - Children and young people are able to enjoy and achieve via receiving good quality education and access to activities that help them reach their full potential.
8. The Services in the Department, alongside a range of partners, work to deliver these ambitions. The work of each Service is set out within Annual Service Delivery Plans.

Statutory Framework

The Director of Children and Family Services

9. Section 18 of the Children Act 2004 requires every top tier local authority to appoint a Director of Children's Services (DCS). In Leicestershire, this post is referred to as the Director of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The DCFS has professional responsibility for the leadership, strategy, and effectiveness of local authority children's services. The DCFS is responsible for securing the provision of services which address the needs of all children and young people, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and their families and carers.
10. In discharging these responsibilities, the DCFS needs to work closely with other local partners to improve the outcomes and well-being of children and young people. The DCS is also responsible for the performance of local authority functions relating to the education and social care of children and young people.

The Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS)

11. Section 19 of the Children Act 2004 requires every top tier local authority to designate one of its members as Lead Member for Children's Services. The LMCS, as a member of the Cabinet, has political responsibility for the leadership, strategy, and effectiveness of local authority children's services. The LMCS is also democratically accountable to local communities and has a

key role in defining the local vision and setting political priorities for children's services within the broader political context of the Council.

12. The Lead Member is responsible for providing strong, strategic leadership and support and challenge to the DCFS and relevant members of their senior team as appropriate.

Roles and Responsibilities of Children's Services

13. Local authorities are bound by almost 300 statutory duties in relation to children's services. A broad summary of the duties is set out below.

Safeguarding

14. Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities and other named statutory partners to make arrangements to ensure that their functions are discharged with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
15. The DCFS has the responsibility within the local authority for improving outcomes for children and young people, children's social care functions and local cooperation arrangements for children's services.
16. The DCFS also has a crucial role in ensuring collaboration and dialogue with the family courts so that high quality local authority assessments and other evidence contribute to effective and timely court processes for children.

Vulnerable children and young people

17. The CFS Department is responsible for working with partners to promote prevention and early intervention and offer early help so that emerging problems are dealt with before they become more serious. More specifically, the DCFS and LMCS in their respective roles:
 - Have a shared responsibility with all officers and members of the local authority to act as effective and caring corporate parents for looked after children, with key roles in improving their educational attainment, providing stable and high quality placements and proper planning for when they leave care;
 - Must ensure that disabled children and those with special educational needs (SEN) can access high quality provision that meets their needs and fund provision for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan;
 - Must ensure arrangements are in place for alternative provision for children outside mainstream education or missing education (for example, due to permanent exclusion or illness) to receive suitable full-time education;
 - Should ensure there is coherent planning between all agencies providing services for children involved in the youth justice system, secure the provision of education for young people in custody and ensure that safeguarding responsibilities are effectively carried out; and,

- Should understand local need and secure provision of services, taking account of the benefits of prevention and early intervention and the importance of co- operating with other agencies to offer early help to children, young people, and families.

Fair access to services

18. The Department is responsible for promoting the interests of children, young people, parents, and families and working with local communities to stimulate and support a diversity of school, early years and 16-19 provision that meets local needs. The DCFS and LMCS in their respective roles:
- Must ensure fair access to all schools for every child in accordance with the statutory School Admissions and School Admissions Appeal Codes and ensure appropriate information is provided to parents;
 - Must ensure provision for suitable home to school transport arrangements;
 - Should actively promote a diverse supply of strong schools, including by encouraging good schools to expand and, where there is a need for a new school, seeking proposals for an Academy or Free School;
 - Should promote high quality early years provision, including helping to develop the market, securing free early education for all three and four year olds and for all disadvantaged two year olds, providing information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents, and ensuring sufficient childcare for working parents;
 - Should promote children's and young people's participation in public decision making so they can influence local commissioners; and,
 - Should promote participation in education or training of young people, including by securing provision for young people aged 16-19 (or 25 for those with learning difficulties/disabilities).

Educational Excellence

19. Working with headteachers, school governors and Multi Academy Trusts and Academies, the CFS Department is responsible for promoting educational excellence for all children and young people and being ambitious in tackling underperformance. The DCFS and LMCS should in their respective roles:
- Take rapid and decisive action in relation to poorly performing schools, including using their intervention powers with regard to maintained schools and considering alternative structural and operational solutions;
 - Develop robust school improvement strategies, including choosing whether to offer such services in a competitive and open school improvement market, working beyond local authority boundaries;
 - Promote high standards in education by supporting effective school to school collaboration and providing local leadership for tackling issues needing attention which cut across more than one school, such as poor performance in a particular subject area across a cluster of schools;

- Support maintained schools in delivering an appropriate National Curriculum and early years providers in meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (as outlined in the EYFS Statutory Framework);
- Establish a schools' forum for their area, maintain a scheme for financing; maintained schools and provide financial information; and,
- Undertake specified responsibilities in relation to staffing and governance of maintained schools.

Children and Family Services Staff Numbers

20. There are 1400 (1218 FTE) staff who work in the Children and Family Services Department across 30 Services. The Department is organised into two operational sections lead by two Assistant Directors; Targeted Early Help and Social Care and Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs. Commissioning and Planning and Business Services are managed centrally via the Director of Children and Family Services. A detailed structure of the Department can be found in Appendix A.

Services

21. The Children and Family Services Department delivers its statutory functions, roles, and responsibilities through its Services. Each Service is led by a Service Manager who reports into a Head of Service who is responsible for the leadership and management of an area of the department's business.

Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care

Community Safety

22. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, County Councils are designated as 'Responsible Authorities' of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), which places a duty on them to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder. The Community Safety Team (CST) attend all CSP meetings and support with priority setting for three-yearly partnership plans and annual delivery plans.
23. Under S29 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, specified authorities must have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. The CST supports agencies across Leicestershire with their Prevent Duty, delivering training and sharing good practice as well as ensuring the Council is discharging its duty.
24. The CST provides a leadership role across LLR in relation to community safety priorities and developing joint approaches on issues including Anti-Social Behaviour, domestic abuse, serious violence and hate work. The team also co-ordinates the response to Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) in the County.
25. The Team is currently leading the discharge of the authority's statutory duty under the Domestic Abuse Bill and is co-ordinating the plan around the

£1.1million spend to support the duty, the discharge of the forthcoming Serious Violence Duty and the work on Trauma Informed Working with CFS colleagues.

Head of Service: Safeguarding, Improvement, Quality Assurance and Performance

First Response –Screening and Assessment

26. First Response provides the immediate response to all new contacts from members of the public and professionals in relation to children and young people. These range from information sharing, requests for Early Help support, and social work support.
27. The screening process applies the Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR) threshold for intervention to provide robust and timely responses applying careful oversight and performance measure to provide assurance. This is coordinated closely with colleagues from the Family Help service (formerly Children and Families Wellbeing Service (CFWS) to avoid drift and delay when support is required.
28. Requests for social worker intervention, both planned and in response to immediate safeguarding concerns, are progressed to a team of social workers who carry out assessments of need and risk in line with statutory responsibilities, with robust management oversight and close liaison with key agencies including local schools, health and police.

Practice Excellence, Safeguarding and Performance Service

29. The Safeguarding and Performance Service has a broad range of key service activities undertaken by three specialist teams: The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service, Quality Assurance Team, and Corporate Parenting Team.
30. The Service delivers the statutory responsibility to provide independent oversight and critical challenge plans for children in care and subject to child protection plans in Leicestershire but also leads the Department's Quality Assurance framework to drive improvement, with key responsibilities for both performance management and quality assurance by means of thematic audits, linked to improvement objectives and service specific learning. At the heart of both processes is ensuring that the voice and views of children and young people are captured and are central to decision making in assessment and planning processes and in measuring the impact of intervention.
31. The Head of Service is also responsible for the Safeguarding Business Office which supports the key work of the Safeguarding Partnership across Leicestershire and Rutland and key areas across LLR.
32. The Practice Excellence team provides leadership and direction to teams, managers, and practitioners to support improvement in the quality of practice with children and families across the department. The Team supports staff to

fully embed the departmental practice framework and has well established links to the quality assurance work so that emerging learning is shared systematically via coaching, mentoring, training, virtual workshops and individual support to teams and practitioners.

33. The Team leads the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice approach and contribute to the sub-regional and national community. They are also responsible via the Principle Social worker to lead on the Department's approach to becoming a Trauma Informed organisation.
34. The Team applies a range of approaches and coordinates, analyses, and disseminates the findings and conclusions from quality assurance activities, feedback, from children and their families and the workforce to inform the Continuous Improvement Plan - Achieving Excellence via purposeful practice 2024-2027.

Homes for Ukraine

35. This Team was established following the Government response to support Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war. They provide support to Ukrainian guests and their hosts to enable them to settle successfully in the community for the time that they remain in the United Kingdom.

Head of Service: Family Help, Youth and Justice, Exploitation and Families Together.

Family Help

36. The Family Help service was established in February 2024, bringing together staff within the old Children and Family Service and some staff from Children's Social care with a focus on providing early support to children and families to build strength and resilience and children assessed to be Children In Need, who require social work involvement or oversight. The new Service is based on evidence that by social workers and alternatively qualified staff working together to provide the right service, at the right time and right level from the right skill mix of staff, there is greater opportunity to build family resilience and strength to achieve positive outcomes and less long-term reliance upon statutory services.
37. The wider 'Targeted' Family Help service works with families who may encounter a broad spectrum of issues, including those who may be on the cusp of requiring specialist statutory services. The service provides support or advice to all members of the family (the whole family approach), as appropriate to the circumstances.
38. A number of Family Hubs have been established across the County in order to bring together partner agencies working in the community to offer early intervention, practical, intensive support and advice and assistance to children and families. A key driver is the 'Best Start for Life' national strategy, focused on ensuring every child has the best possible start from conception to age five.

It promotes early intervention through integrated services such as health, parenting support, and early education, with a strong emphasis on Family Hubs as central access points for families. The strategy aims to reduce inequalities, improve early years outcomes, and support vulnerable families through better access to childcare, enhanced workforce training, and targeted support for children with additional needs. Complementing this, '*Five to Thrive*' is a simple, evidence-based framework used within the Targeted Family Help service to support healthy brain development and emotional wellbeing. It encourages five key relational activities—respond, cuddle, relax, play, and talk—which help build secure attachments and resilience in children, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and mental health. This evidence based approach is being promoted across all areas of Children and Family Services.

39. The Service has a focus on school inclusion and assisting families to receive the most appropriate support for their child's needs to help in building resilience in families. As such, developing pathways and services for children with special educational needs is a priority for the service.
40. From September 2022, Public Health have commissioned, through Public Health funding, the Children and Family Services Department to deliver Teen Health services. The Teen Health service sits within Family Help and has established links with all schools within Leicestershire to provide advice, group work/ drop-in sessions and individual work with young people aged 11 plus around key emotional wellbeing and health.
41. The Teen Health Service is part of the County's Health Child Programme, focussing on early intervention and preventative public health for young people. The Service has successfully been embedded within all Secondary schools in Leicestershire. Each Wellbeing officer can offer one to one support, group work, drop in sessions and sexual health support. The Service sits within the Targeted Family Help Triage service and has close links to children's social care First Response to ensure a robust safeguarding response.
42. The Extended Domestic Abuse service also sits under the umbrella of Family Help, co located with Triage and First Response providing a coordinated response for early help domestic abuse cases. The Service offers one to one support to families and group work which includes specialist support to adults that cause harm open to statutory social care teams.

Vulnerability Hub and Families Together.

43. The Vulnerability Hub is co-located with the police at Wigston Police Station and provides carefully coordinated responses to the screening of all domestic abuse notifications together with police and Early Help colleagues. This includes daily information sharing with schools in line with Operation Encompass, whereby schools are formally notified of any reported incident of domestic violence at an address at which children are present or normally resident and representing children's social care in daily Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings for high-risk domestic abuse victims.

44. The Hub also represents the multiagency response to Child Exploitation, building on the original Child Sexual Exploitation team and taking a broad proactive approach to all forms of exploitation, including responses to missing and multiagency management plans for children where risk is assessed to be high. The Team benefits from close working arrangements with the Police, Leicester City and Rutland colleagues and those from health and education. The Hub also provides a base for the Out of Hours service which delivers timely responses to children out of normal office hours.
45. Families Together team was established in November 2023 to be a wraparound immediate response team to support young people at risk of coming into care to remain (when safe to do so) in their network.

Youth and Justice

46. The Youth and Justice Service comprises of two distinct areas of delivery of services to children from 10 years old until young adulthood. Youth Justice work is delivered to children who have been in Court or have been diverted from Court following contact with the Police. This work is guided by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and places a statutory responsibility on Local Authorities to deliver Youth justice services. This is done in partnership with the Police, Probation Service, Education and Health Services. Youth work is delivered to children who require a targeted input from a Youth Worker around areas such as emotional wellbeing, safety and vulnerability, engagement with education or substance misuse. The Service also delivers a services to young carers, young adult carers and children have been missing. Interventions are delivered across a variety of different means from group work and one to one sessions. A core component of the Service is the County Youth Council of Leicestershire (CYCLe), which is a forum for children and young people to co-produce with Leicestershire County Council and other agencies across the partnership providing a valuable youth perspective on topical matters.

Head of Service: Family Safeguarding and Disabled Children's Services

Family Safeguarding

47. Family Safeguarding aims to provide the children and families of Leicestershire with a dynamic and good statutory social work service, utilising relevant assessment processes to enable a continuum of support, care, and protection. This will include the development and implementation of SMART care planning from point of referral through to the end of service and in line with Social Work Practice Standards. Family Safeguarding Teams across the County support children and families of children who are subject to child protection plans and those who may need protection through use of care proceedings and alternative care arrangements.
48. The work of Family Safeguarding is delivered through skill mixed locality pods, who work with and support children and families until the work is completed and support is no longer necessary, can be offered by a more appropriate service or

until alternative family / care arrangements are in place. This may include using Private Law Processes and the Public Law Outline until long term solutions are identified that will provide stability, safety, and permanence for the child.

Children with Disabilities

49. The Disabled Children's Service consists of two social work teams. Staff follow social care procedures and support those who are children in need, on a child protection plan, in care and care leavers. All children are seen regularly and benefit from a single assessment and support plan to enable as much independence and to improve outcomes for children across all aspects of their lives.
50. The Service embraces the social model of disability and acknowledges that although a child's disabilities can create difficulties in their lives, many of the problems they and their families face are due to negative attitudes, prejudice and unequal access to the things necessary for a good quality of life.
51. Staff in the service are specialists in working with children who experience disabilities and their families. The staff make assessments of need which support safe and creative daily living for disabled children, their families, and carers. Following the Signs of Safety ethos and approach, staff have a range of skills and tools to help ensure that the child's views are heard and acted upon, regardless of level of need.

Head of Service Children in Care, Care Leavers Fostering and Adoption.

Children in Care Service

52. The Children in Care Service comprises of five teams. There are four Children in Care teams who work with those young people who have a long-term care plan to be accommodated by the local authority either under Section 20 or a full care order and one team focused on Special Guardianship orders.

Care Leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Service

53. There are three specialist teams working with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) to ensure that the needs of these young people are assessed in a timely way, including age assessments. The needs of UASC are met through the Looked After Children and Care Leaver procedures, in addition to providing specialist support with their asylum status applications.
54. The two Care leavers Teams works with young people over the age of 16 who are no longer looked after but are entitled to support up to the age of 25. The service continues to have a duty to children to maintain regular contact, support them in accessing employment, education or training and ensure that they have appropriate, sustainable accommodation.

Fostering and Sufficiency

55. The Service manages, assesses, and supports foster families, to ensure compliance to the Fostering National Minimum Standards. The Service regularly develops the recruitment strategy to ensure that it is effectively communicating and engaging with potential foster carers. The Service provides diverse training opportunities to carers to meet the needs of the children in their care and provide high quality matching decisions when placing children. The Service provides a wide range of support to carers including supervision, engagement activities, newsletters, and a Facebook group.
56. The Service has developed a wide range of specialist carers to meet the complex needs of some of the children that it works with. There is also an established Supported Lodgings Scheme to meet the sufficiency of young people requiring additional support in their transition to adulthood.
57. In addition to the core element of providing a wide range of carers, the Fostering Service also recruits, assesses, and supports Independent Visitors to become befrienders for looked after children and young people, assesses private fostering arrangements and offers ongoing support and completes assessments for Step Parent Adoptions.
58. The Department has recently become a Fostering Friendly employer which staff are pleased and proud of.

Permanence and Adoption Service

59. The Service will prioritise the early permanence of those children who cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, through either adoption or support to identify long term foster carers. The Service regularly develops a recruitment strategy to ensure that it is effectively communicating and engaging prospective adopters. The assessment process includes a well-established training and information sharing offer which supports robust assessment and, if appropriate, approval for persons wishing to adopt. The Service supports approved adopters in finding an appropriate match for their family.
60. The Permanence Team focuses on the journey of the child and completes the Child Permanence Reports and Family Find, using robust matching, and supports this process until adoption is achieved. It will provide lifelong post adoption support, with a strong emphasis on supporting those adopters for the first three years after their Adoption Order has been granted.
61. The Service also provides post Special Guardianship Order support for the first three years after the granting of the order. To support maintained connection with birth families, the Service co-ordinates and facilitates letter box contact between adopted children and their birth family. Support is provided to birth families who have been affected by adoption through the First Family Support Service and also to adults who have been adopted, through the Birth Records Counselling Service.

Agency Decision Maker

62. This function sits with the Assistant Director, one Head of Service and a person in a defined Agency Decision maker role. It is responsible for best interest decisions for children where adoption is the plan, final approval of adoptive and foster carers and the regular reviews of foster carers. It is a key function and statutory responsibility of the Adoption and Fostering agency, in this case the Local Authority.

Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs

Head of Service Education Quality and Inclusion

Inclusion Service

63. The Inclusion Service aims to support all children and young people, with the help of their parents or carers and educational establishments, so that they have access to, and to be receive high quality educational provision. It also aims to provide opportunities for young people to prepare them for a successful transition into adult life, through employment, training, or education.
64. The Service delivers the local authority's statutory functions for children missing education and children with medical needs. Other services include support for those children who are electively home educated, Post 16 education employment and training and the early identification of SEND support.

Education Effectiveness Service

65. There are four services that come under the umbrella of Education Effectiveness: The Education Effectiveness Partnership, Safeguarding in Education, Anti Bullying and Governor Support and Development Service.
66. The Education Effectiveness Partnership manages the communication between schools and the local authority, both at an individual level (with an Education Effectiveness Partner with recent school experience linked to each setting) and at a system wide level, channelling regular updates to all schools, and bringing together an understanding of overall educational performance and issues to co-ordinate positive meaningful interventions. The team also exercises statutory functions around primary assessment and moderation and newly qualified teachers.
67. In addition to supporting schools and the local authority with safeguarding children and meeting statutory requirements, the Safeguarding in Education Team operates a traded service, delivering training to Designated Safeguarding Leads, Managing Allegations, Safer Recruitment and whole staff safeguarding awareness raising. Almost all Leicestershire (and Rutland) schools subscribe to this offer. They also undertake consultations with pupils and work on behalf of the Safeguarding Children Partnership on an annual safeguarding return and offer an e-safety Award to schools.
68. The Anti-Bullying Team provides advice, support and training to schools and the wider children's workforce.

69. The Governor Support and Development Service offers a core training programme covering all aspects of maintained and academy strategic and financial governance and performance management of school leaders, including training for maintained schools in accordance with the local authority's duty to provide free training to governors volunteering in maintained schools, a more extensive traded offer (including clerks training), access to a telephone helpline and bespoke packages, including external reviews of governance, for schools as identified. The understanding of school governance and strong links with education effectiveness and inclusion services provides an opportunity to support and influence governance to develop more inclusive and effective schools. The Service also maintains and develops a guidance service for GDPR.

The Virtual School

70. The purpose of the Virtual School (VS) is to promote positive outcomes for all children and young people in care in Leicestershire and to support schools/settings/colleges to narrow the achievement gap for these. This aim also extends to early years children, care-leavers and children and young people who have left care as a result of a Child Arrangements Order, a Special Guardianship Order or an Adoption Order. It is a statutory requirement for all local authorities to have a Virtual School Head, whose duty is to promote the education of looked after and previously looked after children in line with statutory guidance (February 2018).
71. The Virtual School is "virtual" in the sense that it works to support children and young people in care as if they were in a single school, even though they are educated in many different schools and settings across the country. Each child or young person in care has an allocated education officer, one of a dedicated team of professionals who contributes to Personal Education Plan meetings (PEPs), Reviews of Arrangement meetings (ROAs) and other multi-agency meetings as appropriate. Their role in these meetings is to promote higher educational aspirations and a greater accountability from all those involved in their care.
72. The Virtual School gives advice and information about the education of previously looked-after children to schools, parents, and any other agencies the Virtual School Head deems appropriate. The Virtual School supports Leicestershire care leavers to live independently and access Education, Employment and Training opportunities.
73. The Virtual School Head also holds the responsibility to promote the education of children who have a social worker. This strategic role involves tracking which LCC services provide support to children in this cohort as well as encouraging multi service and agency working. It also includes work with schools to ensure that they are trauma informed and communicating well with social workers.

74. A recent addition to the duties of the Virtual School head is to promote the education of children in kinship care. This is a new duty and came into force from September 2024.

Executive Head of County Primary and Secondary Short Stay Provision

75. The Oakfield Short Stay provision delivers the Local Authority's statutory duty to provide full-time education for children of compulsory school age who, because of exclusion, illness or otherwise, would not receive suitable education without such provision being arranged. This duty is referred to as 'the Section 19 duty'.
76. Oakfield Short Stay School also provides education and support for Secondary and Primary aged pupils who are at risk of exclusion. This is delivered through the Oakfield Graduated Response and is a three-tiered prevention programme. This includes a multi-disciplinary team that provides school-based advice, the deployment of a specialist team of support in school, and a two-day Oakfield based placement, that provides education and intervention.

Head of Service: Commissioning for Learning

Admissions Service

77. The Service ensures the statutory co-ordination of first-time admissions to primary schools, infant to junior and secondary school transfers in compliance with the national School Admissions Code. It provides a statutory mid-term transfer service for maintained schools and a traded service for academies who opt in, as the majority of Leicestershire schools do. A key role that follows this is the co-ordination and presentation of admission appeals.
78. With the continued emergence of academies, the Service increasingly provides support, guidance and oversight of a large number of admission policies for 'own admitting authorities'. The service also takes a lead role in Fair Access Protocols to ensure that vulnerable or hard to place children secure a school place as quickly as possible. The work of the service requires annual returns to the DfE regarding place allocations.
79. The Service is also responsible the licensing of young people for employment and entertainment, for example paper rounds or shows, and the respective monitoring of this.

School Organisation Service

80. The fundamental role of the Service is to meet the statutory duty placed on the local authority to ensure that a school place is available for every child that requires one (for children of all ages and abilities). To meet this duty the Service manages pupil forecasting, capacity assessments for schools, and annual statutory returns to the DfE which in turn drives the allocation of basic need capital grants. The Service will also plan, prepare, and deliver an annual capital programme for new basic and high needs (specialist) school places.

81. The service has a key role in liaising/negotiating with housing developers, landowners, local planning authorities and respective agents to secure Section 106 funding for school expansions and new schools and taking a key role in all legal matters relating to this.
82. The core business functions of the Service also include the co-ordination of all academy conversions (including oversight of related property and legal matters), managing statutory change in schools 'prescribed alterations', age range changes, statutory vestings and land transfers, and managing the allocation of capital funds for safeguarding and health and safety matters.

Early Years, Childcare and Inclusion Service

83. This Service carries out the local authority duty to secure sufficient and high-quality childcare provision (including out of schools and holiday provision) which supports parents back into work or study. The Service commissions and delivers support to those providers that are judged to be less than good by Ofsted and provides advice and guidance to all providers.
84. The Service has a responsibility to administer and monitor the take up of the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) for eligible 2 year olds, universally for 3 and 4 year olds and for the early years' pupil premium. The Service is managing the responsibility to increase the availability of FEEE to wider groups and the wraparound childcare expansion. It uses a target operating model and a key feature of this is to promote sustainability via effective peer to peer support and collaboration mechanisms through strategic partnerships.
85. The Service provides educational advice as part of a statutory assessment which may lead to an Education, Health and Care plan being produced. A multi-agency approach enables staff to liaise closely with other professionals involved with the child/ family and support referrals to other agencies.
86. Training, support, advice, and guidance is provided to Early Years settings by Area SENCOS in order for them to deliver their statutory requirements regarding the SEND code of practice and to promote the inclusion of all children in Early Years settings.

Leicestershire Music Service

87. Leicestershire Music Service provides support to county schools in planning and delivering their music curriculum through direct teaching and training for teachers.
88. The Service has a traded offer, allowing schools to buy in as well as extra-curricular activities that families can sign their children up for. There are also several groups run by the Service and performances organised that enable large numbers of Leicestershire children to come together and perform in public.

89. Leicestershire Music is funded solely by grant funding through the Arts Council for their work as lead partner of the Music Hub for Leicester and Leicestershire where they deliver the National Plan for Music Education in Leicestershire. All other funding is generated through their traded activity.

Head of Service Education Strategy and Transformation

Education Strategy and Transformation

90. This Service area has oversight of the Council's strategic direction, development and transformation of Education to ensure it remains responsive to national and local developments and is responsive to changing patterns of identified need. It has accountability for the Department for Education's Change Programme Partnership and the co-ordination and delivery of phase three of the programme – in addition to planning the operational response and strategic service changes in line with the upcoming Education White Paper.
91. It is responsible for the development and delivery of the Belonging in Education Strategy and whole system approaches to ensuring children and young people can live their best life and transition into an adulthood of independence, choice and control.

Education Quality and Performance Service

92. This Service is responsible for Education Quality and Performance of internal services across Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs.
93. The Service works closely with Business Intelligence and the Service Delivery Team that oversees the Line of Business System, to embed appropriate reporting so performance against KPIs can be monitored on a monthly basis by Senior Management within the Department. This team works with service areas to embed and sustain change and monitor the impact of service areas. It works closely with Finance Business Partners to support projected growth and demand analysis
94. It is responsible for undertaking the statutory duty aligned with the 'Local Offer' and works closely with families and children, providing information and capturing voice.
95. In addition, the Service leads the Quality Assurance Framework, driving improvements from across service areas. Education quality is monitored closely by the data quality team, who work directly with service areas to improve the quality of data, which is paramount to accurate reporting and statutory returns. From this work, performance improvement strategies and training needs are identified for service areas, groups or individuals.

Head of Service: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Special Educational Needs Assessment Service

96. This Service is responsible for responding to requests for Education Health and Care (EHC) in a timely manner, to annual reviews of EHC Plans (EHCP) received from schools and colleges and amending\ceasing EHCPs as required. The Service is responsible for carrying out Annual Reviews for those with an EHCP who are home educated. The Service is also responsible for responding to Special Educational Needs tribunal appeals on behalf of the local authority.
97. It is responsible for managing placements for children with an EHCP into special schools, specialist nurseries and specialist resource bases and commissioning Independent Specialist Placements, ensuring efficient use of resources.

Specialist Teaching Service

98. The Specialist Teaching Service (STS) consists of four teams of specialist staff, working together as one service, in partnership with other professionals from education and health and social care where appropriate, to provide coordinated and effective support and advice for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Leicestershire Education Settings and for children with hearing or visual impairment from birth.
99. The Service includes the Vision Support Team, the Autism and Learning Support Team, the Hearing Support team, and the Assistive Technology for Education Support Team (ATfEST).
100. The STS provides valuable support, advice and challenge to ensure that schools make reasonable adjustments and use best endeavours to support children.

Educational Psychology Service

101. The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) works to support children and families, primarily through work with schools and early years providers, drawing from expertise in psychology and child development. The service works with schools to support them to offer high quality early support and to build confidence in inclusive practice through information, resources and leaflets, advice and guidance via a helpline, support with critical incidents, information and signposting and phone consultation with groups of schools. The Service also undertakes targeted casework and provides supervision to staff in schools who deliver Emotional Literacy Support Assistance (ELSA).
102. The Service is responsible for undertaking EHC Needs Assessments, Tribunal work, complex casework at the request of SENA and Priority Annual Reviews (via phone and/or video).
103. Schools can subscribe into the Leicestershire EPS annual Service Level Agreements, including Educational Psychology consultation with staff and parent(s)/ carer(s) and bespoke training on staff resilience and wellbeing.

104. Schools and education settings can also buy into Social Emotional and Mental Health training packages, for example on Supporting Anxious Children and Coping with Bereavement and Loss, as well as ELSA Training.

Strategic Lead Transformation, Commissioning and Planning

Service Manager Transformation and Change

105. In 2021 CFS initiated another major change programmes, Defining Children and Family Services for the Future 1 (DCSF), which with the support of a business management consultant firm and LCCs Transformation Unit, saw the redesign of a number of services to ensure children receive the right services at the right time.
106. One of the integral assertions of DCFS is that the new operating models will also bring about more efficient and effective practice, resulting in more independent families who require less costly interventions over time from the local authority.
107. DCSF2 was initiated in 2023 and continues to be supported by the Transformation Unit. A number of projects are in implementation phase and this second phase was expanded in 2024 to include the review of how services from the external market are commissioned. The work is underpinned by diagnostic work completed by the business management consultant firm.
108. The Change Team was established in 2023 and operates across the CFS Commissioning Service, Children's Social Care and Targeted Early Help to ensure that benefits achieved from the DCSF are sustained.

Head of Service: Commissioning and Planning

Commissioning Service

109. Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation with their local authority areas. In these circumstances, section 22G requires local authority, as far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure there is sufficient accommodation that meets their needs and is within their local authority.
110. To meet these requirements, local authorities are required to systemically review their current situation in relation to securing accommodation for looked after children and set priorities. Children and Family Services does this through the publishing of the Market Position and Sufficiency Statement 2024-2027, which uses multiple data sources to inform sufficiency and commissioning priorities.
111. The Commissioning Service is a support service that sits across the department whose primary role is to deliver priorities as set out in this statement; and offers support and advice regarding all aspects of the

commissioning activity, including the planning and procurement of services from the external market, market shaping, the brokerage of placements (education and social care) and short breaks, and the quality assurance and contract monitoring of provision with external providers.

112. The Service works closely with the Corporate Commissioning Support Unit (CSU), Finance Business Partner, Business Intelligence Service and Legal Services to ensure that it is able to give appropriate commercial advice and support.

Business Services

Head of Service: Business Services

113. Business Support Services provide high quality support across the department, ensuring good quality data inputting, appropriate administration processes, HR, Finance within individual service areas are in place to meet the needs of the various teams. The approach is to work with teams, chairs of meetings and panels to make sure the business support offer is commensurate with their needs, including supporting all senior managers, staff in the department, and having key relationships with other departments, District Councils, partners, community and voluntary organisations, members of the public within the county, and professional and technical services such as Information Management, Business Continuity, Emergency Planning, Transport, Property, Health and Safety, Human Resources and ICT around the support required, whilst developing software systems to support those service needs.
114. The Service ensures the development of digital benefits which are fit for the future and to meet service demands, whilst ensuring SMART processes are implemented in a way that makes the best possible use of available resources. It supports all logistics across the department and embeds new ways of working into business as usual when possible, at all 25 locality offices, supporting all service areas. The service has robust processes for managing the departments Freedom of Information requests, Breaches and Subject Access Requests (which includes regular audits of recommendations) and managing trend information to enable better management of data, information, and security.

Background Papers

Children and Family Services Department Plan 2023-2026:

<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/0ec5130b-cb6b-4e05-8ed8-131ed6944b39/lcfs-department-plan-2024-26.pdf>

Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_-_stat_guidance.pdf

Working Together to safeguard children 2018:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942454/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_inter_agency_guidance.pdf

Market Position and Sufficiency Statement 2024-2027:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s186147/Appendix%20-%20Childrens%20Social%20Care%20Placements%20Market%20Position%20and%20Sufficiency%20Statement%202024-27.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

115. None.

Appendices

Children and Family Services Department Structure November 2025.

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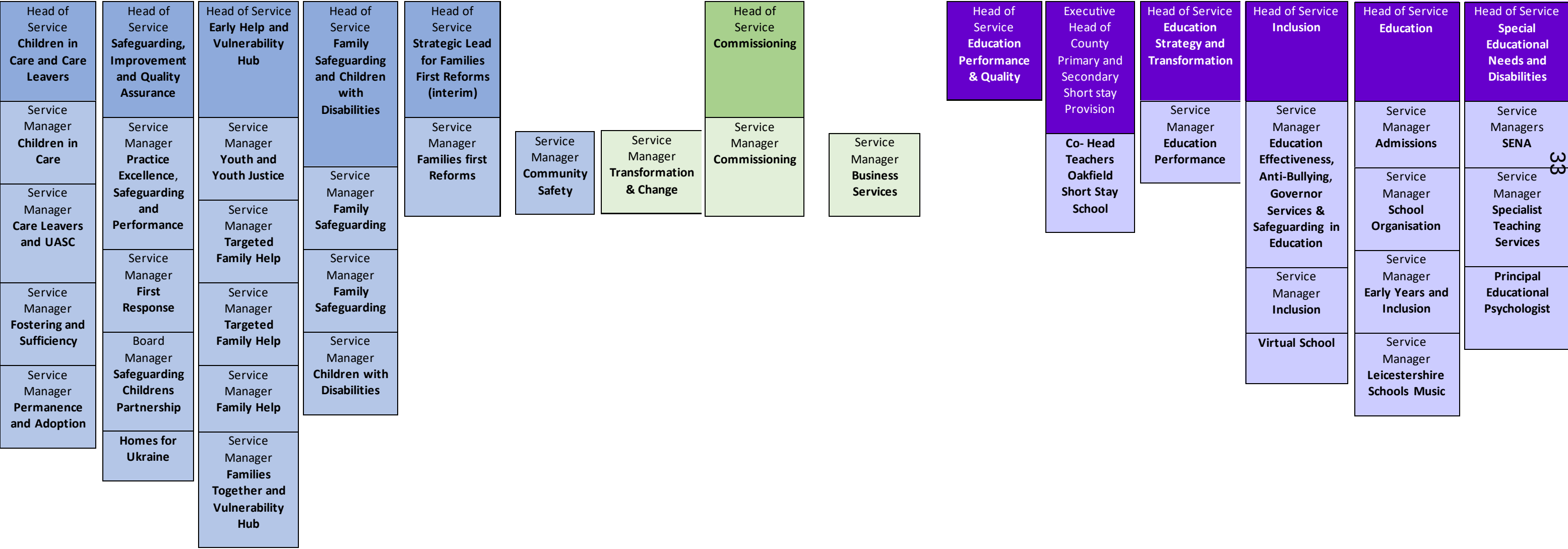
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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 4 NOVEMBER 2025

INCLUSION IN LEICESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the functions of the Inclusion Service.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. A report on Inclusion in Leicestershire Schools was presented to the Committee on 3 June 2023 which focused on the functions of the Inclusion Service and the rising demand within the Service.
3. Reports on Pupils Missing out on Education were also presented to the Committee on 4 June 2019 and 21 January 2020 which focused on the Council's response to the national reports Forgotten Children: Alternative Provision and the scandal of ever-increasing exclusions (2019) and Children Missing Out on Education Report (2020).

Background

4. In November 2013, Ofsted published a report entitled Pupils Missing out on Education which detailed how local authorities are required to fulfil their statutory duties regarding educational provision and safeguarding for those children who do not, or cannot, attend full time education. The report defined Pupils Missing out on Education (PME) as children of compulsory school age who are not accessing full-time education (either in school or in alternative provision). In its guidance to schools and local authorities, Ofsted advised that all schools (including academies, free, independent, private, and non-maintained schools), must monitor pupils' attendance through their daily register and must inform local authorities of pupils who are regularly absent from school or have missed 15 days or more (whether consecutive or cumulative) without permission.
5. The reports, Forgotten Children (July 2018) and Skipping School: Invisible Children (2019) highlighted concerns around the children who are missing out

on educational opportunities due to a rise in exclusions; an increase in the numbers of children having poor quality outcomes when accessing alternative provisions; families opting to home educate due to unmet SEN needs in mainstream settings; and children who are 'off rolled' when their needs are not being met within a mainstream setting.

6. Following these reports, there were two papers that set out recommendations in response:
 - The Timpson Review of School Exclusion (2019) highlighted 30 recommendations in which the Government, Department for Education, Ofsted, Local Authorities and Schools had to respond to in order to develop a consistent approach therefore minimising the need to exclude children. The Timpson Review concluded that there was more that could be done to ensure that every exclusion is lawful, reasonable, and fair and that permanent exclusions should always be a last resort, used only when nothing else will do.
 - An Ofsted research study within the East Midlands, 'Moving to home education in secondary School' (2019) raised concerns that the decision for parents to home-educate was not always a positive one for all involved and suggested there was an increasing evidence-base that home education can be a last resort for some families when relationships have broken down between schools and children or parents. The findings arising from this report strongly recommended that Local Authorities and schools should develop clear processes for working together as soon as there are indications that a family may be considering home education. Both reports highlighted the importance of children being visible to ensure they are safeguarded from potential harm and receiving an adequate education.

Statutory Duties of the Local Authority and Parental Requirements

7. Schools must monitor pupils who are missing out on education and in most cases, they will remain the responsibility of the school where they are on roll. However, in some cases the statutory duty for a child's education becomes the responsibility of the local authority, for example:
 - Children Missing Education (CME) - Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. Local authorities have a duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to establish the identities of children in their area who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise. Children Missing Education Statutory guidance for local authorities (2024) further outlines the duties held by the Local Authority to establish the whereabouts of children and to provide a point of contact for referrals for children missing education.

- Children with Medical Needs: local authorities must arrange suitable full-time education (or as much education as the child's health allows) for children of compulsory school age who, because of illness would otherwise not receive suitable education.
 - Elective Home Education: Since April 2019 Local Authorities' duties' have been further clarified by the Department for Education (DfE). There are no direct legal requirements for the local authority regarding Home Education: however, the local authority does have powers at its disposal if it appears that a child is not receiving an adequate, safe, or appropriate education.
 - Attendance: Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024) outlines the Local Authority's strategic role in improving attendance across the county through supporting schools to take a strategic approach to attendance, monitoring attendance data across the County and targeting support where it is most needed. Joint working with schools and wider services is also required to provide formal support options for children and young people.
8. Section 13A of the Education Act 1996 – gives local authorities the duty to ensure that its relevant education functions and training functions are (so far as they are capable of being so exercised) exercised by the authority with a view to:
 - promoting high standards;
 - ensuring fair access to opportunity for education and training; and,
 - promoting the fulfilment of learning potential by every person to whom this subsection applies.
 9. Section 7 of the 1996 Act requires parents to provide an efficient, full-time education suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and any special educational needs which the child may have. Section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996 sets out that the Local Authority must act if it appears that parents are not providing a suitable education.
 10. Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 requires Local Authorities to make arrangements to ensure that their education functions are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting children's welfare.
 11. Within Leicestershire, DfE guidance is followed in that informal enquiries are made that include a request to see the child by the Inclusion Team, either in the home or in another location. However, the parents are under no legal obligation to agree to this simply in order to satisfy the local authority as to the suitability of home education. Although a refusal to allow a visit can, in some circumstances, justify the service of a notice to the parent or if safeguarding concerns exist, a referral to children's social care.

12. In terms of excluded pupils, The Education Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils (England) Regulation 2007 states that for permanent exclusions, the local authority must arrange suitable full-time education for the pupils to begin no later than the sixth school day of the exclusion. This will be the pupil's 'home authority' in cases where the school is maintained by (or located within) a different local authority. In addition, where a pupil has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the local authority may need to review the plan or reassess the child's needs, in consultation with parents, with a view to identifying a new placement.

Leicestershire Inclusion Service

13. The Inclusion Service was created in September 2019; the primary purpose of the Service is to ensure the inclusion of all children and young people in education. The demand for the Service has grown over time; the after effects of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this but in 2025 there continues to be a growing need for support for children and young people who are experiencing barriers to attendance. The numbers of those children and young people classed as having medical needs (CMN) has increased significantly in this academic year. The electively home-educated cohort of children (EHE) has seen a further increase, as has the number of children missing education (CME).
14. The Service responds to the educational needs of children and young people who are missing out on education. Pupils missing out on education (PME) are children of compulsory school age who may be on the roll of a school or setting but aren't accessing full-time education, either in school or in alternative provision. These children and young people generally fall into one of the following categories:
 - Children Missing Education (CME): children who are on roll but not attending a school or an educational setting, and children who are not on a roll of a school.
 - Children with Medical Needs (CMN):
 - Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)
15. The Service also works with schools who have children and young people who are Pupils Missing out on Education (PME) due to low attendance through supporting schools to adopt inclusive practices and providing challenges where necessary.
16. Families who have elected to home educate their children (EHE) are also the responsibility of the Service and the Local Authority's statutory duties are fulfilled through the work carried out.
17. Where children and young people are also known to the Special Educational Needs Assessment Service, Children's Social Care or Children and Families Wellbeing Service, a lead professional or service is identified, ensuring a coordinated approach to the management of the child's case. However, regular liaison with the Inclusion Service will take place through the Senior

Information support coordinator during the triage process - which is discussed with the Inclusion Manager who maintains oversight of these children and young people and ensures that the Inclusion Service takes ownership if appropriate when other service involvement is completed or no longer required.

18. The Inclusion Service is led by a service manager who is supported by four managers within the Service, with a new Prevention Manager role which has been appointed to. The Senior Information Support Coordinator is responsible for overseeing new cases received and ensuring that they are referred to the correct service, whether that is Inclusion or in another area. Two managers are Team Managers who each have an oversight of a team of Education Officers, Graduated Response Inclusion Practitioners (GRIPS) and Youth Workers. The Education Officers work with families and schools to ensure that a clear plan for education is in place and reviewed regularly. Education Officers meet children and young people in their homes or in public places, as well as attending meetings in schools.
19. In May 2022, the Court Team joined the Inclusion Service, having been previously a part of the Admissions Service. The same month, new government guidance was published outlining the increased duties of local authorities in the document Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2022).
20. The Court Team was renamed as The Attendance Team to reflect the new duties and to emphasize that their primary role is to support children and young people back into school, not to fine and prosecute families. This addition to the wider Inclusion Service has been an asset as both teams have the same objective: to get children into school.
21. Where the child has barriers, such as mental health difficulties for example, the Inclusion Education Officers and GRIPs provide support to help them to overcome these. Where the barrier to attendance is the parent or carer, the Attendance Team provide the necessary levers to encourage engagement with support. Many cases can sit between the two areas and so joint working is required. Having Inclusion and Attendance under the same umbrella has made joint working easier and more productive, allowing the service to streamline processes and facilitate multi-agency working where appropriate. The Attendance Team Manager role has developed to become the Cohesion and Compliance Manager. This role oversees the Attendance Team and is responsible for ensuring that the different areas within the whole of the Inclusion service work well internally, as well as being responsible for leading on work with other services across the Children and Families Department.
22. The table below provides the number of children on the roll of Leicestershire schools, split by primary, secondary and special schools, which gives some context for the numbers of children who are not accessing education through school, as outlined in the sections below.

Leicestershire Children

23. Current numbers of children on roll in a Leicestershire school as of 15 May 2025 (last available census data):

Primary	54,226	53.87%
Secondary	44,493	44.2%
Special	1,935	1.92%
Total	100,654	100%

Children Missing Education (CME)

24. There has been a marked increase in the number of CME over the past four years. The Inclusion Service holds the list of all children who do not have an education and health care plan and have no school place. The Service works closely with Admissions to secure school places for CME. The work involves advising parents on which schools have available spaces and encouraging them to take places up, rather than submit appeals to schools that are full. There has been a recent and significant increase in the number of children and young people classed as CME; this is due to the streamlined processes in the EHE team, where a suitable and efficient education is not in place for a child, the child is classed as CME and the Attendance team are involved swiftly; they will instruct families to apply for a school place or issue a school attendance order.

CME referrals Summer Term	2024/25	2025/26 (as of October 14th)
	285	324

25. During the 2024/25 academic year, the Service has further streamlined processes to ensure that any children who are not in receipt of a suitable and efficient education are identified quickly and classified as children missing education (CME). Families are then supported to secure a school place for their children either through the application process or through the issuing of a school attendance order (SAO) if necessary.
26. Where communication with parents has not been successful, the service will undertake checks with external agencies to ensure safeguarding duties are fulfilled. Service level agreements are in place with HMRC, Health services, and Border Controls to support investigations in cases where there are concerns about a child's welfare and indications that a child may have left the country.
27. As part of our standard process, Education Officers conduct home visits as the initial point of contact with families. These visits aim to establish engagement before any further checks with external partners are undertaken.

Primary reasons for children missing education:

Total number of Children	355
Child missing education	50
Awaiting School place	3
Believed moved to another LA	2
Bullying	5
Medical/SEND needs	1
Dissatisfaction	3
Moved from abroad	42
Did not receive school preference	14
Moved from another LA	136
Not recorded	20
Other	40
Unsuitable home education	19
Awaiting a school appeal	3
Waiting to start school	2
Low/non attendance	5

Pupils Missing Education (PME)

28. The numbers of children who are not attending their schools has continued to grow; while the pandemic had a significant impact on children, in 2025 we continue to experience high demand on the Inclusion Service through school referrals where children and young people are not attending. The mental health of some children and young people remains fragile and parental anxiety is high. During the past two years, the Service has developed its offer to PME in order to build resilience in the system and to reduce waiting times. Referrals coming into the Service now go through a rigorous triage process which has two steps: the PME Information and Support Coordinator, upon receipt of the referral will provide support and advice directly to the referring school and if necessary, remind them of their duties with regard to making reasonable adjustments for children and young people.
29. The Senior Information and Support Coordinator post, which is relatively new in the Service, is held by an ex-SENA/Inclusion Officer. Therefore, Information and Support Coordinators all have rigorous oversight of referrals to enable them to provide solid advice and next steps to schools or to know when the referral should be passed to the second stage of triage.
30. This is where the SENA/Inclusion officers provide direct support to the referring school. This support may be offered remotely or in person; they will convene team around the school (TAS) meetings and signpost schools to services that can provide further support. At times, an officer may act as an intermediary where relationships between school and family have broken down, working to restore these and to align expectations of what school can offer a child struggling to attend. The SENA/Inclusion Officer will hold the case, checking back in with the school until the latter feels confident to continue the support independently.

31. Where children and young people require further support, they will either be offered a course of online support group sessions with a youth worker or will be placed on a waiting list for the allocation of an Education Officer, as per the traditional offer from Inclusion. Due to the multi-layer support offered by Inclusion, waiting times are much improved for children.
32. The current waiting time for allocation is 68.5 days with just 27 children waiting for allocation, compared to 132.5 days and 92 children waiting for allocation compared to July 2024.

PME referrals	
2023/24	882
2024/25	739
2025/26 (as of October 13 th)	153

33. Reasons for CYP not attending school include:
- Incident in school that family feels is unresolved
 - School place in desired location not available
 - Family feel that the schools are not meeting their child's needs
 - Risk of exclusion
 - Family move (without notifying school/LA)
 - Other mental health concerns
 - Trauma experienced by CYP/family
34. Families, children and young people who have experienced trauma, are signposted to support services by education officers dealing with their case. The Inclusion Service is committed to the Council's trauma-informed approach to support and work closely with relevant services, such as the Virtual School and the Practice Excellence Team within Children's Social Care, to ensure that schools are offered relevant training and that the members of the Service itself are well informed on trauma-informed practice and utilise it within their work.

Exclusions

35. East Midlands and National data are taken from the DfE reporting using the School Census.

Academic year 2022/23	Fixed period suspensions	Permanent exclusions
National	9.3%	0.11%
East Midlands	10.7%	0.12%
Leicestershire	8.4%	0.07%

Academic year- 2023/24	Fixed period suspensions	Permanent Exclusions
National	11.3%	0.13%
East Midlands	13.4%	0.15%
Leicestershire	10.5%	0.07%

Breakdown of Leicestershire data

School Type	Exclusion/Suspension	2022/23	2023/24	24/25 (suspensions based on autumn and spring terms only)
Primary	Permanent	11	13	11
	Suspension	732	1089	852
Secondary	Permanent	56	59	85
	Suspension	7,672	9444	6371
Special	Permanent	0	0	0
	Suspension	40	89	82

36. The effects of the pandemic continue to impact children and young people at school. The cohort who missed their Year 6 to 7 transition are now in Year 11. The younger pupils, now in primary school, are seeing an increase in difficulties with speech and language due to the isolation they experienced. The closure of early years' settings also meant that additional needs in the very young were not identified at an early stage, resulting in a widening gap between them and their peers. Demand for support at primary level with behavioural support strategies has increased. This is also the case for younger secondary aged children.
37. The rise in permanent exclusions because of those factors continues. The rise in the number of children at Key Stage 3 (aged 11-14) being permanently excluded or directed to learn offsite led the Secondary Education Inclusion Partnerships (SEIPs) to develop their offer to cater for this cohort. All areas now offer a 'reset' program for KS3; this is aimed at supporting them to remain in school through part time provision that covers core subjects and pastoral work on self-management. As of the 25/26 academic year, the SEIPs have been brought into the Local Authority and now form part of Oakfield Short Stay School, which has extended its age range to enable this.
38. The Inclusion Service works alongside Oakfield Primary (Leicestershire's short stay school for those primary-aged children who have been or are at imminent risk of being excluded). Multi-service meetings are convened with schools to offer high support and high challenge where permanent exclusion of a younger child is being suggested by a head or in some cases, where an exclusion has been issued. The Inclusion Service provides robust challenge where necessary, attending governors' panel meetings in some cases to demonstrate an alternative path for a child facing exclusion.
39. Parents and carers are supported in making their decision for future provision for their child. Where an agreement can be reached to use alternative provisions for a child or young person, permanent exclusion can be avoided. However, financial pressures on schools do make alternative placements difficult to fund, particularly when the need amongst pupils in a school is high.

Children with Medical Needs

Annual total amount of referrals	
2022/23	174
2023/2024	178
2024/25	162
2025/2026 (active open referrals as of October 13 th)	31

40. There has been a significant rise in recent years of children with medical needs. Much of this increase relates to the mental health of children and young people who are struggling with anxiety and feel unable to cope with the large and noisy environment of school. Each month the service experiences some CYP previously classed as PME become CMN when they provide the level of medical evidence required to receive tuition through the Local Authority.
41. Children with medical needs are defined as those who are too ill to attend school and have medical evidence to support this. Some of these children may be in hospital and are tracked by the CMN coordinator and those based in their own homes are supported by education officers who plan and oversee provision.
42. The Service to support these children is through tuition which can be either in groups or one-to-one. Tuition can be delivered online or in person depending upon the needs of the individual. Progress meetings between the Inclusion Service, tutor and school help to ensure that the young person is following a suitable curriculum to support their transition back into school at the appropriate time.
43. Through the Local Authority's recoupment policy, the Inclusion Service can claim the Age Weighted Pupil Unit funding (AWPU) from schools to help meet the costs of tuition. Where schools do not agree to the recoupment policy, they may decide to put their own tuition in place, using staff from their school to maintain provision for the children and young people on their roll who are too unwell to attend.
44. The Service also has the offer of an AV1 Robot. The robot is placed in the classroom where the child would normally attend school. It acts as the eyes and ears of the child at home who can access the camera and microphone through an application on a mobile phone. While this technology is impressive and effective, the robot itself is better suited to use in a primary setting, where classes take place in the same room throughout most of the day.
45. Most of the CMN cases within Inclusion are for secondary aged young people. As a result, the AV1 robots are now offered to primary aged pupils who are missing education (PME), they are not able to attend school but there is no medical evidence in place to support their absence. Schools now identify children much earlier when signs of anxiety are the reason where there is a decline in attendance. We have seen schools use the AV1 robots as part of the transition back into school alongside schoolwork packages as an early intervention to encourage children back into school swiftly, before they reach

the status of CMN, due to being out of school for so long, their barriers are significant, and they need their learning to take place outside of a school setting. The Service holds termly CMN webinars to support schools to understand the referral process and what supporting medical evidence is required as part of the CMN criteria.

Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

46. Each Local Authority's post 16 data relating to children who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) is compared with that of other local authorities in England. In reporting, Local Authorities are placed in quintiles according to their performance.
47. For 2024, the performance for England was as follows:
- NEET & Not Known – Quintile 3 (4.7%)
 - NEET – Quintile 1 (0.7%)
 - Not Known – Quintile 5 (4%)
 - Participation in education or training – Quintile 4 (94.9%)
 - September Guarantee – Quintile 3 (96.3%)
48. Leicestershire's data remains the same as in previous years except for the 'Not Known' category where the 4% figure was slightly higher than usual and therefore placed us in the 5th Quintile compared to the 4th Quintile in 2023. (The Quintiles are on a scale of 1 being the best and 5 being the worst except for the Participation category where 5 is the best and 1 is the worst).
49. The September guarantee is where a Year 11 pupil has an offer for post 16 education. Those students classed as unknown are those who the Service holds no information about post 16 destinations. Information about destinations is reported to the Service by schools, colleges, and other providers, as well as from the families and young people themselves.

2024/2025	APR-24	May-24	June-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sept-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25
NEET%	0.87%	0.91%	0.92%	0.96%	1.01%	0.81%	0.85%	0.79%	0.97%	1.29%	1.32%	1.50%
NEET Number	132	137	139	145	153	127	133	123	151	201	206	235
Not Known	7.03%	4.14%	4.14%	4.15%	4.08%	89.97%	75.61%	28.44%	7.02%	3.70%	3.67%	4.00%
Not Known Number	608	624	624	627	616	14021	11787	4439	1096	577	572	625
Vulnerable NEET%	5.80%	5.75%	5.80%	5.85%	5.86%	5.35%	5.53%	5.35%	5.55%	6.04%	6.39%	6.45%
Vulnerable NEET Number	101	100	101	102	102	105	105	105	109	119	126	127

50. Work continues to encourage young people in Year 12 to engage with the Service when it reaches out to them to find out their status. The Service also works with secondary schools to source information which helps us to reduce.
51. Over the academic year, the number of EET cases have increased overall but the number of unknown students continues to fall. As data becomes available, the Service can identify the destination of students. Any students who are 19 without provision are signposted to appropriate resources and sources of support. Those who are vulnerable, either through having SEND needs that require an EHCP or having been in the care system, are eligible for intense support from Education Offices who specialise in EET.
52. The Inclusion Service offers a high level of support to these vulnerable young people, ensuring that they are aware of the opportunities open to them, through job, apprenticeship, and education provision searches. The officers then identify suitable opportunities as well as upskilling the young people to conduct their own searches. Further support is given to ensure that young people can make successful applications and perform well at interview.

Electively Home Educated Children (EHE)

53. EHE Children are those children who are educated at home through parental/carer choice. They are not on the roll of any school; families are responsible for planning, resourcing and delivering all aspects of their education. The annual figures covering the last three years of EHE children are:

Year	Annual Total
2021/22	880
2022/23	1050
2023/24	1272
2024/25	1424
2025/26	1271(to date)

54. Trend of new referrals coming into the Service for EHE:

Year	Annual Total
2022/23	437
2023/24	578
2024/25	608
2025/26	158 (to date)

55. The Service continues to see a rise in the number of referrals for EHE in line with the rest of the country. The DfE reported a national rise from Autumn 2023 when there were an estimated 92,000 children in elective home education to Autumn 2024 when there were 111,700 children in elective home education as reported by local authorities.
56. The referral forms used by the Inclusion Service require schools to confirm that they hold robust conversations with families looking to home educate. The

Service then triangulate this when making contact with families that are new to EHE. Webinars are still offered to all parents who are new to elective home education and a termly newsletter is sent directly to all home educating parents in an attempt to make sure that all offers for other agencies, for example Health, are made available to children who are not educated through school.

57. The autumn term webinar for parents and carers of Year 11 young people continues to run where advice and support on entering and sitting examinations as well as post 16 options is shared.
58. The main reason for families choosing this option over the past twelve months has been that education provision could not meet need; areas around school unable to meet needs with SEND and mental health being a significant factor to parental choice, which has then often led to attendance difficulties. The data below is taken from October 2025 which takes account of all children currently being electively educated at home:

Total number of Children	1271
Attendance Difficulties	94
Awaiting School place	15
Breakdown in relationships	89
Bullying	5
Medical/SEND needs	84
Cultural/Life choice	214
Provision not meeting need	103
Did not receive school preference	11
Mental Health	187
No reason given	221
Other	234
Emotional/Behavioural	11
No school place	3

59. Joint work with colleagues from other services strives to support schools to meet the needs of all children and our goal is that families choosing to electively home educate should only be doing this as the result of a positive choice rather than as a last resort. We want to enable schools to meet the complex learning needs of their pupils by ensuring that they can access support services in a timely way, whether that be to prevent exclusions or to adapt curriculum and teaching to enable pupils with specific learning needs to engage fully with mainstream education.

Background Papers

Inclusion in Leicestershire Schools, January 2022:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=6880&Ver=4>

Pupils Missing out on Education in Leicestershire, 21 January 2020:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MID=6179>

Pupils Missing out on Education in Leicestershire, 4 June 2019:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=5683&Ver=4>

Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs (2013):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/657995f0254aaa000d050bff/Arranging_education_for_children_who_cannot_attend_school_because_of_health_needs.pdf

Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (2015):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/803956/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions.pdf

Ofsted press release 2013: Local Authorities Failing Children who are Missing Education:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-authorities-failing-children-who-are-missing-education>

House of Commons Education Committee 2017-19 Forgotten children: alternative provision and the scandal of ever increasing exclusions:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/342/342.pdf>

Children's Commissioner 2019: Skipping School: Invisible Children:

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/skipping-school-invisible-children/>

Timpson Review of School Exclusion 2019:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

Education Act 1996:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>

Ofsted 2019: Exploring moving to home education in secondary schools: research summary:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exploring-moving-to-home-education-in-secondary-schools/exploring-moving-to-home-education-in-secondary-schools-research-summary>

Section 175 Education Act 2002:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/175>

Transparency data 2012 NEET and participation: local authority figures:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neet-and-participation-local-authority-figures>

Elective Home Education Survey 2021, November 2021:

https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_EHE_Survey_2021_Report_FINAL.pdf

Working together to improve school attendance, May 2022:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

Explore Education Statistics: Elective Home Education December 2024:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education/2024-25-autumn-term>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

60. None

Equalities Implications

61. There are no equality implications arising from this report. However, the work of the Inclusion Service actively seeks to reduce inequality.

Human Rights Implications

62. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
4 NOVEMBER 2025

LEICESTERSHIRE'S RESPONSE TO TACKLING CHILD CRIMINAL
EXPLOITATION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the work and progress of the Child Exploitation, Missing and Modern Slavery Hub.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remains a strategic priority for Leicestershire County Council, and the county council remains an active member of the Child Exploitation Regional Leads group.

Background

3. Leicestershire County Council's Child Exploitation (CE) Service are located at South Wigston Police Station, which also houses the Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit, Child Exploitation Team and Missing Team. The Vulnerability Hub, as it is called, enables the succinct response to child exploitation by all agencies, creating a multi-agency response in line with the government's recommendations "to combat the national threat of all forms of CCE and respond to the local prominence of incidents of CCE and Missing children and young people."
4. The multi-agency approach within the Hub continues to benefit children within Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (LLR) at risk of exploitation on a daily basis.
5. A Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) attended by representatives from LLR, Police and Health is held at the Hub where all incidents of suspected exploitation or children going missing in the prior 24 hours are reviewed. If assessed as being high risk, the Hub assigns the child to a police officer from the dedicated Police Child Exploitation team and a social worker from the Child Exploitation team based in the Hub.
6. To review the multi-agency and safeguarding response to high risk exploited children a fortnightly Operational Review Meeting (FORM) is held. The same agencies involved in the DRMM's and additional statutory and third centre attend these meetings to provide updates on the safeguarding intervention that is taking place for

children identified as being at high risk of exploitation, and to also provide multi-agency oversight and agreement if a child is downgraded to medium or low risk.

7. In January 2024, the Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Operations Group amalgamated with the Serious Youth Violence (SYV) Group. The group is now called Preventing Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Delivery group. This group is a sub-group of the Adolescent Safety and Diversion Board, and it is tasked with leading the priority: Embedding improved joint response to young people at risk or involved with Exploitation Youth Violence, including a focus of young people who go missing. On an operational level, the Multi Agency Child Exploitation meeting reports into the Preventing Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Delivery Group, providing assurance of multi-agency operational oversight and response to children at risk of exploitation.
8. In April 2024, Ofsted inspectors arrived in Leicestershire to complete an inspection of children's services. One of the inspectors visited the Vulnerability Hub and the Service had the privilege of showcasing the multi-agency approach to combating child exploitation. The feedback the Child Exploitation service received was positive and validated the work being achieved within the Vulnerability Hub:

"Children at risk of extra-familial harm benefit from specialist support, interventions and timely assessment from highly skilled multidisciplinary workers in the vulnerability hub. Daily multi-agency meetings take place to enable professionals to review intelligence and risks effectively. The impact of these processes is helping professionals to be informed, to map activity and networks, and to undertake disruption work to reduce the risk of harm."

Children who frequently go missing from home and are at risk of exploitation in the community receive determined and impactful support from specialist workers in the vulnerability hub. Workers are tenacious in trying to engage children who have been missing, making good use of return home interviews. Information from return home interviews is used effectively to inform individual risk assessments and helps professionals to identify wider risks to children."

Inspection of Leicestershire local authority children's services 22 April to 3 May 2024.

Activity and Updates

9. On 18 March 2025, for Child Exploitation Awareness Day, the Child Exploitation team organised and delivered an awareness raising day to staff within LLR Children's Social Care and external agencies. This was held at Leicestershire Police Force Head Quarters and attended by police colleagues and colleagues from education, health and some third sector agencies. Leicestershire's Child Exploitation Team focused their theme on the voice of the parents of exploited children. A video was created with a parent of a child who had been criminally exploited and demonstrated their experiences on the journey that their child took. This was a very powerful video which was well received by everyone who attended. Permission has been provided by this parent for the video to be used as a training tool and the Child Exploitation team have shared this with various sections of Children's Services and education establishments. The team were supported to deliver the training with colleagues from Police and Health. Positive feedback was received from attendees.

10. Over the last eight months, Leicestershire's Child Exploitation Team has been committed to addressing how high risk children who experience risks beyond the home environment are managed. Guided by the learning and frameworks developed by Carlene Firmin (a British social researcher and writer specialising in violence between and against young people, creator of the concept Contextual Safeguarding), Leicestershire's Child Exploitation Team have collaborated with colleagues in the Safeguarding team to identify an approach to safeguarding that supports practitioners to recognise and respond to the harm young people experience outside of the home.
11. The approach to managing contextual safeguarding is to develop Harm outside the Home (HoTH) meetings. The meetings will be delivered through a lens of safeguarding and child welfare, where the primary risk is harm outside the home, and they are deemed to be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and as such will be chaired by independent chairs who also chair Child Protection Conferences. Harm Outside the Home meetings will be held following a Child and Family Assessment, when it is deemed that the context is one in which young people are at risk of significant harm. As such the meeting focuses on findings of the assessment including risks, vulnerabilities and strengths with associated actions. A proportion of the meeting is used to discuss an intervention plan (Community Safety Plan) and to task actions to agencies and partners. The focus and attendees of the meeting will vary depending on the context and will include practitioners and agencies who can influence the nature of that context, such as district councils, local businesses etc. The young people who are subject of Harm Outside the Home meetings will be allocated to a social worker within the Child Exploitation Team, who will hold case responsibility for progressing the young person's Community Safety plan.
12. The implementation of Harm Outside the Home meetings has taken time to embed, largely due to the need to adopt new ways of working that differ from established practice. This shift has required thoughtful coordination across services, adjustments in approach, and the development of shared understanding, all of which take time to establish effectively. While progress has been steady, the commitment to ensuring these meetings are purposeful and well-integrated remains strong.
13. The Service is actively working with regional partners to share learning and strengthen collective understanding of the complexities involved in implementing Harm Outside the Home meetings. This collaboration has provided valuable opportunities to reflect on emerging practice, explore different approaches, and identify what supports effective implementation. By engaging in open dialogue and joint problem-solving, the Service and partners are building a more consistent and informed response to contextual safeguarding across the region, ensuring that young people experiencing harm beyond the home receive the most appropriate and coordinated support.

Performance and Activity

14. A range of data is collected on behalf of the multi-agency CE team on a quarterly basis and analysed by Leicestershire County Council's Business Intelligence Service. The data includes:
 - i. Child Sexual Exploitation referrals and outcomes;
 - ii. Child Criminal Exploitation referrals and outcomes; and,
 - iii. Missing children.

15. CSE data for Leicestershire in Q1 recorded 16 referrals. The Child Exploitation Screening tool was completed for all 16 referrals. The data from these screening tools indicate that the 14-15 years age bracket was the most dominant age bracket, which is different to Q1 in 2023-24 where 16-17 years was the dominant age bracket. North West Leicestershire was the geographical area which generated the most referrals at seven of the 16. The Service allocated seven of the 16 referrals to the Child Exploitation team. Online exploitation continues to play a part in most of the referrals. In Q2 there was an increase to 29 referrals for a total of 21 individual children. The dominant age group was 14-15 years, with all of these being for females.
16. CCE data for Leicestershire in Q1 recorded 34 referrals for 31 children, with the dominant age group being 14-15 years old. There is an even geographical split between North West Leicestershire and Hinckley and Bosworth which is reflective of the activity in these areas. The Service had seven children placed outside of Leicestershire who were referred to the Child Exploitation team in this quarter. In Q2 there was an increase to 47 referrals for 45 individual children. Overall, the 16-17 age bracket was dominant; however, this was only one more than the 14-15 age bracket. Geographically, Hinckley and Bosworth generated the most referrals, which is representative of the activity in this area. The Service is supporting 12 of the 13 children referred to us from this area.
17. Missing data for non-looked after children (non-LAC), in Q1 shows that there were 66 episodes for 38 individuals, with an even split of 19 females and 19 males. Q2 shows that there were 77 missing episodes for 49 individuals, with 30 females and 19 males having missing episodes.
18. Missing data for looked after children (LAC) during Q1 was 197 episodes with 108 episodes attributed to 28 females and 89 episodes to 27 males. Looking at the detail, 21 of these children were Leicestershire LAC with 82 missing episodes, whilst 39 children were out of area LAC with 115 missing episodes. During Q2 there were 265 missing episodes with 104 episodes attributed to 37 females and 161 episodes attributed to 56 males. The detail of these missing episodes are 36 children were Leicestershire LAC with 148 missing episodes, whilst 57 children were out of area LAC with 117 missing episodes.
19. In Q1 a total number of 144 missing return interviews were completed for Leicestershire children. Missing Return Interviews were not completed for a total of four episodes for Leicestershire children, both non-LAC and LAC due to circumstances relating to the child. In Q2 a total number of 185 missing return interviews were completed for Leicestershire children. Missing return interviews were not completed for a total of five episodes for Leicestershire children, both non-LAC and LAC due to circumstances relating to the child.

Next steps

20. Leicestershire County Council are committed to working with partners across Leicester City and Rutland to progress and improve our response to serious youth violence and children who go missing. This work will be led by the Preventing Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Delivery group.

21. As the Service continues to embed Harm Outside the Home (HoTH) meetings into safeguarding practice, the next phase of development will focus on reviewing and refining the systems that support this work. This includes ensuring that recording, tracking, and information-sharing mechanisms are aligned with the principles of contextual safeguarding and enable effective multi-agency collaboration. By strengthening the infrastructure around HoTH meetings, the Service aims to enhance consistency, improve oversight, and ensure that interventions are both timely and impactful for the young people we support.
22. On 18 March 2026, Leicestershire County Council alongside partners in Leicester City and Rutland will deliver the Child Exploitation Awareness Day. The aim of this day, as in previous events will be to encouraging everyone to think, spot and speak out against abuse and adopt a zero-tolerance to adults developing inappropriate relationships with children or children exploiting and abusing their peers

Conclusions

23. The report highlights the positive partnership work that continues to take place within the Vulnerability Hub and how this has been reinforced with the feedback from Ofsted. The report also demonstrates the changing nature of child exploitation and the council's commitment to learn and modify our services for where they are needed. Adapting to the changing landscape of child exploitation remains a priority for the Child Exploitation Service.

Background papers

24. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

25. None.

Equality Implications

26. The Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Equality Act 2010 and aligns our practice with the Children and Family Services core values and behaviours that underpin everything that we do with children, young people and their families such as being aspirational, being curious, being collaborative, listening to what children and families are telling us, building relationships and improving outcomes for the children and families we work with.

Human Rights Implications

27. As with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Human Rights Act (1998) and ensures those using and delivering services are supported and respected under the principles of Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity and Autonomy. As such, the service is focused on ensuring that all agencies supporting a child being exploited, first and foremost see the child behind the behaviour and to move away from a "blaming" culture.

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: NOVEMBER 2025**

LEICESTERSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with the Annual report into Leicestershire's Adoption agency for the period March 2024 to March 2025.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards 25.6, all Adoption Agencies are required to provide one six month and one annual report to the Executive regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel. To meet this standard the Adoption Service submits an annual report for the Lead Member for Children and Families and Director, and an annual report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
3. This report provides information about the Adoption Service's work during 2024-25 with an overview of activity and achievements over 2024 and 2025. The report also continues the recommendations for future activity in this area of work
4. A copy of the full annual report is appended to this report.

Background

5. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory and regulated responsibilities relating to adoption. The main roles of the Adoption and Permanence Service is to provide high quality adoptive placements, a range of adoption and special guardianship support and other permanency options, including profiling for long term placements for children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council and are unable to live with their birth families.
6. Adoption and Permanence Services are provided to:
 - Children who are to be adopted;
 - Birth parents;
 - Prospective and approved adopters;
 - Children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services;
 - Children and Special Guardians who require therapeutic support and advice, where the child lives permanently in Leicestershire; and,
 - Adopted adults.

7. The Adoption Service is led by the Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering and Adoption, and managed through a Service Manager who has responsibility for the three teams that make up the adoption service, Assessment and Support, Permanence, and Post-Order Support.

Summary of Report

8. Leicestershire County Council is part of the Family Adoption Links (FAL), a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020.
9. This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, and North Lincolnshire Council. Northampton Children's Trust joined the partnership in January 2022. Lincolnshire County Council remains acting as host for the arrangement.
10. The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14 October 2020 and describes how FAL manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.
11. Through working in partnership, the Service continues to benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.
12. The vision of the Partnership is that:
 - Children have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them;
 - Matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children;
 - Adopters receive a consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process;
 - The same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region; and,
 - Family Adoption Links, local authorities and VAAs work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters.
13. The Adoption Score card presents the performance data for Local Authorities over a three-year trend and one-year trend. The three main key performance indicators are:
 - A10 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family;
 - A2 - The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family; and,

- A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child.
14. Against all three key performance indicators the three-year trend data remains relatively stable. Against two of three indicators, the one-year trend data for 2023/24 is highlighting an increase in the number of days in comparison to the previous year.
 15. Whilst most children have their permanence achieved in a timely manner, there have been a small number of children whose plans have been delayed. Detailed consideration of information regarding individual children is routinely completed by managers and the Service Manager. All children who have agreement to a national search for adopters are subject to a case discussion between the Service manager, team manager and social worker every three months to ensure that the care plan remains appropriate and that any delay is understood and challenged where necessary.
 16. Improved data collection means that all children are tracked from the point of Pack A request. Monthly Improvement Cycle Meetings ensure that any drift and delay is identified, challenged and rectified. Pack As are the documents to complete if the Service believes that the plan for the child is likely to be adoption.
 17. A range of work is completed by several teams within the Service to ensure priorities and targets are met:
 - The Recruitment Team - enhancing the overall recruitment and experience of prospective Adopters.
 - The Assessment and Support Team – to engage with prospective adopters through their assessment and once approved to support adopters in matching them with a child and supporting them through to the granting of an Adoption Order. Assessments continue to be completed in house. This has had a positive impact on relationships between the Council and adopter applicants, meaning prospective adopters want to work with the Service and where possible to adopt children from the area. There has been an increase in the number of adopters who receive a positive Qualifying Determination (approval by the Agency Decision maker to be approved adopters) without the requirement of extra work.
 - The Permanence Team – work alongside colleagues in Family Safeguarding teams to progress plans for children where adoption may be required. Permanence team social workers also undertake all family finding activity for children who need permanence via adoption.
 - The Post Adoption Support Team – work as part of a team around the family, offering support to the child and parents relating to the therapeutic needs of the adopted child and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
 - The Birth Records Counselling Team - providing services to adopted adults who wish to access their adoption information.

2024-2025 Achievements highlights:

18. The Service is proud of the following achievements:
- Continuing to be part of Family Adoption Links and to be involved in developing a high quality service to children and adopters;
 - Promoting Staying in Touch, which enable children to have agreed arrangements for a level of contact, both direct and indirect, with birth families and developing successful sibling events;
 - Staff have continued to work creatively and effectively to support children and families across Leicestershire and move children to their adoptive families;
 - In April 2024 Leicestershire's Children and Family Services Department was inspected by Ofsted and received a judgement of Outstanding. Inspectors commented positively about the Adoption Service stating: *'When a decision has been taken that adoption is the right plan for permanence, planning is highly effective. Leicestershire is part of a regional adoption agency (Family Adoption Links) and liaison between social workers and the regional adoption agency is effective, which helps to ensure that family finding happens quickly. When adoption is agreed, the child and their adopters are extremely well supported through their adoption journey. A range of support, including specialist therapeutic support, is swiftly put in place to sustain adoptive placements. This means that most children thrive with their new family.'*

2024-2025 performance overview

Adopter Recruitment

19. In 2024/25, 45 Initial Visits were completed, 29 of which resulted in a Stage 1 start compared to 2023/24 when 44 Initial Visits were completed, 21 of which resulted in a Stage 1 start. During this period 25 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, compared to 14 during the previous fiscal year.
20. Leicestershire County Council hold adoption panels once or twice per month in response to service requirements. During the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025, panel met on 21 occasions hearing a total number of 51 cases. This is an increase on the previous year (1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024) when panel met on 18 occasions, hearing 49 cases and looking at the year prior to this it seems there is a continued upward trajectory.
21. 25 applications and 24 matches were presented to panel during this period, as well as one withdrawal and one retrospective approval of a Scottish adopter for the purposes of a match. One application was a negative recommendation which was supported by panel and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker as a qualifying determination.

Permanency Planning for children

22. At the end of March 2025, there were a total of 33 children with a Placement Order who have not yet been placed with their adoptive families. This is broken down into 23 male children and 10 females. Within this there are nine sibling

groups of two. Nine of these children have links with prospective adopters. Four children have a change of care plan decision, and we are in the process of applying for a revocation of the Placement Order. One child is remaining with his foster carer under the auspices of a Special Guardianship Order, one child is remaining with their foster carer on a long-term basis, the other two children will remain on a Care Order but in different fostering placements. This is due to the complexities around their physical and emotional needs.

23. There are currently 20 children which the Service is actively family finding for, this includes 10 children whose additional needs (health and arising from trauma experiences) make the process of identifying adopters more difficult. This includes groups sibling groups of two children. All children waiting are discussed at local and regional family finding meetings, are profiled at Discovery and Exchange Events and have also been invited or attended the Regional Activity Day.

Adoption Support Fund

24. To 31 March 2025, Leicestershire has drawn down £1,622,481.01 from the Adoption, Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is an increase in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£1,651,340.16) and represents support to 547 families, up from 505 in 2023/24. The total amount of drawn down also includes top up applications where therapy is assessed as being needed to be continued once the initial therapeutic period has ended. Leicestershire has successfully trained workers therapeutically to ensure a better provision of services.

Overview of targets and priorities for 2025/26:

25. The following targets have been set for 2025/26:
 - i. Continue working and developing alongside colleagues in the Regional Adoption Agency, with specific and effective action plans agreed by operational leads and overseen by the Board. This will include being involved in the Peer review and also focussing on improving the Early Permanence offer and developing Staying in Touch practices further. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager by March 2026.
 - ii. Continued focus on the key performance indicators related to the assessment and recruitment of adopters, identify barriers to recruitment and learn from areas of good practice. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Assessment Team manager by March 2026.
 - iii. Focus on timeliness for children by further developing the understanding of children's journey through care to the point of Best Interest Decision and increasing awareness of Early Permanence within Safeguarding Teams. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers by March 2026.
 - iv. To continue to develop the management of panel, ensuring that panel members are appropriately trained to continue to meet the needs of the Service to provide robust scrutiny of the agency. This target is to be

completed by the Service Manager, Panel Advisor and Panel Chairs by March 2026.

- v. Continue to invest in developing processes to strengthen feedback and how these influences change and development. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and FAL Marketing officer by March 2026.
- vi. To continue to develop the service offered to birth parents/first family members, including continued contact, if appropriate, after adoption through the Keeping in Touch agenda. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers by March 2026.
- vii. To provide bespoke training and support opportunities to Special Guardians and the children that they care for. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Post Order Team Manager by March 2026.
- viii. To continue to drive the promotion of direct contact for children after adoption. This will include ensuring that all prospective adopters understand the importance of continued relationships with their first family and that appropriate support is given during the initial stages of setting this up. This target is to be completed by the Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers by March 2026.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. None

Equality Implications

- 27. These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children with a care plan of adoption, including disabled children, young children and those from minority and harder to reach groups. The Adoption Service has a diverse compliment of staff with representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.
- 28. The Adoption Service has an Equality and Diversity Action Plan in place which ensures that all staff are enabled to feel safe and supported, in addition to working towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to tackling inequalities - including relevant research, data, Quality Assurance activity and engagement with children, young people and families.

Human Rights Implications

29. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Appendices

30. Leicestershire Adoption Agency Annual Report 2024-25

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Leicestershire Adoption Service

Annual Report

2024-25



**Leicestershire
County Council**



Leicestershire

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Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Adoption Service sets out the performance for the service in 2024/25 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year 2025/26.

Key messages within this report are:



Achieving permanence for children



Recruitment of Adopters



Staying in Touch

The Adoption Score card presents the performance data for authorities over a 3-year trend and 1 year trend. The three main key performance indicators are:

- A10 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family
- A2 - The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family
- A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child

Against all three key performance indicators the 3-year trend data remains stable. We do not yet have figures from our statistical neighbours for comparison.

Against all three indicators, the 1-year trend data for 2024/25 (table below) is highlighting an improvement in our performance in comparison to the previous year. Whilst most children have their permanence achieved in a timely manner, there have been a small number of children whose plans have been delayed. Detailed consideration of information regarding individual children is routinely completed by managers and the Service Manager.

Our data collection means that all children are tracked from the point of Pack A request and monthly Improvement Cycle Meetings ensure that any drift and delay is identified, challenged and rectified.

Adoption Score Card	2023-24	2024-25	Commentary
A10 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family	878.75 days	682.61 days (decrease of 196.14 days)	Some of this decrease can be attributed to tighter timescales within court processes. Leicestershire endeavours to identify matches quickly and without delay.
A2 - The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family	468.04 days	276.14 days (decrease of 191.9 days)	There is analysis provided within the body of the Annual report relating to this decrease, however it should be noted that this figure includes a small number of children who have waited longer than Leicestershire County Council would have

	hoped. We continue to make high quality matches and are aspirational for our children resulting in a very low disruption rate. This means that our children are living in families that are attuned to their needs and are well supported through bespoke packages of support.
A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child	426 days 384 days (decrease of 42 days) We have seen an increase in the number of siblings being born to children either already in the Public Law Outline process or have recently concluded. For those younger children whose parental situation remains unchanged, we have been able to mostly place in a timely manner and often within the same placement as their older brother or sister.

Recruitment of Adopters

Leicestershire County Council, in line with our Regional partners and other national adoption agencies has seen a reduction in the number of adopter household applications with on average three times more children with a Placement Order than there are available adopters. Combined with this, we are also experiencing an increase in the number of children who would have traditionally been 'easy to place' waiting longer as adopters are less willing to offer permanency to those children who have uncertainty around their future development progress.

The late announcement in relation to the future of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund and then the subsequent notification that the Fair Access Limit was reducing will have an impact on future adopter recruitment.

Leicestershire continue to work collaboratively with our partner agencies as part of Family Adoption Links to actively recruit and train adopters. We have a planned programme of monthly information events that are held virtually and in person. We also use social media and run regular campaigns alongside our recruitment team, going out into the community and attending events such as Leicester Pride to increase awareness of Adoption.

Staying in Touch

The national drive on post Adoption Order contact with birth family has had some impact on recruitment and we have seen one family chose to adopt from overseas in order to exclude the possibility of facilitating future contact between their child and the birth family and one adopter household withdraw from an identified match after a Contact Order was attached to the granting of a Placement Order.

However, Leicestershire County Council remain committed to promoting on going contact between children and their birth family when it is safe and appropriate to do so and already have a small number of adopters who actively promote this.

We have developed a Staying in Touch assessment tool that is embedded within Child Permanence Reports and also run sibling activity days. A dedicated Regional Staying Touch workstream has been set up and is led by Northamptonshire Children's trust to ensure best practice and consistency across Family Adoption Links.

1. Introduction

OUR VISION

Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people, and their families. This means that we will describe the outcomes we want to achieve for children, young people and their families and identify measures that can tell us how well we are achieving against them. We will aim to be the best performing local authority in the country against these measures, and where we are not yet there, we will set stretching targets for annual improvement.

OUR MISSION

Children and young people in Leicestershire are safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities.

Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards 25.6, all Adoption Agencies are required to provide one six month and one annual report to the Executive regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel. To meet this standard the Adoption Service submits a quarterly report to the Senior Management Team and an Annual Report to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

1.1 Our Service

Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory and regulated responsibilities relating to adoption. The main roles of the Adoption and Permanence Service is to provide high quality adoptive placements, a range of adoption and special guardianship support and other permanency options, including profiling for long term placements for children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council and are unable to live with their birth families.

Adoption and Permanence Services are provided to:

- Children who are to be adopted
- Birth parents
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services
- Children and Special Guardians who require therapeutic support and advice, where the child lives permanently in Leicestershire
- Adopted adults

The Adoption Service is led by the Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and managed through a Service Manager who has responsibility for the three teams that make up the adoption service, Assessment and Support, Permanence and Post-Order Support.

Name	Designation
Jane Moore	Director, Children and Families Service

Sharon Cooke	Assistant Director, Targeted Early Help and Childrens Social Care
Nicci Collins	Strategic lead for Transformation, Change and Commissioning
Kelda Claire	Head of Service
Michelle Robinson	Service Manager
Emma Bulgin	Agency Decision Maker
Lisa Deakin	Manager, Post-Order Support Team
Rebecca Gibson/Emma Johnson	Managers, Permanence Team
Caramjit Supra	Manager, Assessment and Support Team
Claire Hurst/Annabelle O'Hagan	Senior Practitioner, Post Adoption and SGO Support
Chloe Flint	Senior Practitioner, Permanence
Lauren Nicholls	Senior Practitioner, Assessment and Support
Katie Charter, Ella Robinson-Gill, Lianne Halford-Graham, Neesha Devri, Sam Blynd, Megan Bramley, Cher Watkins + 1 vacancy	Permanence Team Social Workers
Michelle Smith	Life Story Worker
Grace Springthorpe, Debbie Bevan, Bethany Fox, Leona Hubbard + 1 vacancy	Adoption Assessment and Support Social workers
Scott Barrowcliffe, Stephanie Denham	Assessment Support Workers
Charlotte Fanshawe, Zeena Shepherd, Harriet Pearson Cole, Claire Nichols	Post Adoption and SGO Support Social Workers
Jessie Farrell	Birth Records Counsellor
Sheryl Peberdy, Sarah Short	Special Guardianship Support Workers
Naomi Day	Post Adoption Support Worker
Victoria Williams, Isabelle Coad	Permanence Support Workers
Yashma Koria	Permanence Co-ordinator
Harriet Powell	Panel Advisor

In April 2024 Leicestershire's Children and Family Service was inspected by Ofsted and received a judgement of Outstanding. Inspectors commented positively about the Adoption Service stating

'When a decision has been taken that adoption is the right plan for permanence, planning is highly effective. Leicestershire is part of a regional adoption agency (Family Adoption Links) and liaison between social workers and the regional adoption agency is effective, which helps to ensure that family finding happens quickly. When adoption is agreed, the child and their adopters are extremely well supported through their

adoption journey. A range of support, including specialist therapeutic support, is swiftly put in place to sustain adoptive placements. This means that most children thrive with their new family'

This report should be read alongside the Departmental Plan CFS 2021-25 and CFS Placement Market Position Statement 2024-2027. These are dynamic strategies, geared towards supporting the recruitment of a diverse and confident mix of adoptive families, ensure enduring relationships and high-quality adoption support services. They are integrally linked with other key strategic plans and strategies for the Council:

- Children and Family Departmental Plan 2021-25
- Children & Families Partnership Plan
- Continuous Improvement Plan – Achieving Excellence through purposeful Practice (2024- 2027)
- Adoption Service, Statement of Purpose

1.2 National/local Political Implications

Adoption has been a key part of the Government Agenda since 2012 and has seen significant change, including the publication of various key documents such as the 2013 Statutory Guidance on Adoption, the 2013 Amendments to the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and Regionalising Adoption in 2015.

In 2018 the Adoption Leadership Board became the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB), with a remit to cover previously looked after children subject to adoption or special guardianship orders. This reflects a recognition of the increasing numbers of children leaving care on Special Guardianship Orders, and the need for these children to be able to access support akin to that of their peers who are adopted. Leicestershire County Council's Post-Order Support Team already contains provision for the support of families with children on SGOs, with dedicated support workers located in the team. There is a lifelong offer of support to Special Guardians which mirrors our offer to adopters. We are already delivering many components of The National Kinship Care Strategy – Championing Kinship Care and we continue to develop our service to ensure that our Special Guardians receive the right support at the right time.

In line with the Department for Education (DfE) decision that all local authorities should form Regional Adoption Agencies by 2020 Leicestershire remains a committed partner of Family Adoption Links, alongside North Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire, Leicester City, Rutland and Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

1.3 Progress against last year

Recommendation from previous annual report	Progress
Continue working and developing alongside our colleagues in the Regional Adoption Agency, with specific and effective action plans agreed by operational leads and overseen by the Board.	A new Head of Service was appointed in January 2025. A clear plan for a Peer Review has been established and is due to roll out in September 2025. A staff conference has been arranged for September 2025 and will have adopters, adopted adults and a birth parent attending as keynote speakers. Work streams continue to drive practice and consistency

	across the partner agencies in all areas. Consideration will be given to increasing pan regional working during 2025/26
Focus on the key performance indicators related to the assessment and recruitment of adopters, identify barriers to improvement and learn from areas of good practice. We will measure stage one and stage 2 timeliness with an aim of achieving assessments to be completed within 6 months. This will be achieved by ensuring that recruitment is transparent and that we are clear at the beginning of the process about suitability of applicants to adopt. Robust management oversight will ensure that delay is picked up quickly and addressed	Our timeline figures continue to improve due to increased oversight and robust decision making. Relationships between assessors and applicants are good. We track performance through monthly Improvement Cycle Meetings and delay is understood and where applicable responded to. Once approved adopters are generally matched quickly and chose to remain within Leicestershire.
Focus on timeliness for children by developing our understanding of children's journey through care to point of Best Interest Decision; developing early linking and matching processes; increasing our use of Fostering for Adoption where appropriate to meet children's needs. We will utilise FAL activity days for are children who wait longer and ensure that these children are profiled on our FAL website. We are also driving forward the quality of our Link Maker profiles with support from the marketing officer.	Our collection of data is continually evolving and is used daily to monitor performance and timeliness . Permanence team managers continue to have monthly meetings set up with safeguarding managers to track and review children's journeys and where new children who may be in need of a Best Interest Decision can be identified. One FAL activity day was held in October 2024 – this resulted in interest being expressed in 2 children. Linkmaker profiles are reviewed both internally and through FAL and are consistently of a high standard containing 8 photographs and a video that are regularly updated. 2 Discovery events are held a year where adopters receive secure videos of children 'waiting' which they can privately view for 3 days. We will continue to review the use of National Exchange days to ensure they provide appropriate opportunities for children to find permanence
Develop our panel, ensuring that the central list meets the needs of the service and panels continue to provide robust scrutiny of the agency.	We have a consistent central list and panel members are enthusiastic and committed. Panel will return to being held 'in person' from April 2025. This is after a period of consultation between panel members, social workers and adopters. A training day was held in November 2024, focusing on Staying in Touch, support planning, life story work and Attachment Style Interviews. The central list remains stable with

	a variety of skill sets. Quarterly panel business meetings take place between the service and panel chairs. The service manager also attends panel quarterly to give service updates to panel members.
Develop processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development	This is an area that we continue to develop. We liaise with LAFs (a local support group for adopters and foster carers across Leicester City and Leicestershire) and attend their meetings. FAL is provided feedback from Adopter Hub. FAL also has Collabor8 which is young person's group. The aim of both groups is to work in collaboration to develop services and hear the voice of those directly impacted by our services. We embrace the Lundy Model and strive to ensure that we hear the views of both adopters, adopted children and adults and birth parents and that those views are carefully considered and where appropriate incorporated within our approach. Feedback is sought after all events held and 6 monthly meetings are held with foster carers to gather their thoughts and experiences which are then used to inform practice.
Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members	We have independent counsellors who offer up to 6 sessions of support to families. The service is currently invested in Adoption England's Modernising Adoption agenda which includes a focus on maintaining relationships between adopted children and their first families. This includes siblings and during 2024 Leicestershire hosted it's own bespoke 'Sibling Event' We remain committed to promote direct and meaningful contact between first families and their children when this is safe and appropriate to do so. 7 children have been supported to have contact with their siblings and a further 3 children have been able to have direct contact with their first family as a result of our involvement. This will remain high on our agenda for 2025/26.

2. Family Adoption Links (FAL)

2.1 The Partnership

The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14th October 2020 and describes how FAL manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we are starting to benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a

range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

2.2 Family Adoption Links Vision

The vision of the RAA is that:

- Children have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them
- Matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children
- Adopters receive consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process
- The same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region
- Family Adoption Links, local authorities and VAAs work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters

2.3 Governance and Management

The RAA is accountable to the Family Adoption Links (FAL) Management Board which is aligned to the agreed vision and will enable partners to have a continuing demonstrable focus on achieving permanence through adoption for Looked After Children. The FAL Management Board is accountable for delivery of services within scope and will continue to provide strategic leadership as the service develops. The Board includes representatives of each partner and takes decision by consensus. The Board is chaired by a Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the respective Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors responsible for permanency. The FAL Management Board will ensure there are clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services, deliver value for money, and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. The board has appointed a temporary Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency who oversees the work of the adoption service in each local authority. The Head of Service reports to the board and is responsible for the delivery of adoption services within each LA. Each partner LA retains its own adoption service manager who is the Registered Manager. The FAL Management Board will keep members fully informed regarding the progress and performance of the RAA.

2.4 Management Meetings

Since its launch FAL has held monthly management meetings where updates are provided from each of the dedicated workstreams and the planning of continued and improved service delivery is decided. The dedicated workstreams are focussed on the following areas – Assessment and support of prospective adopters and Family finding, post adoption support, training, early Permanence and Keeping in Touch.

2.5 Assessment, Approval and Family Finding

The Family Finding workstream is led by Michelle Robinson, Service Manager from Leicestershire. The ambition of the partnership is to provide a consistent approach to family finding and ensure that the partnership can meet the needs of most children requiring adoption.

A Regional Family Finding meeting is held on a monthly basis, and children are tracked from four weeks before a Placement Order is granted through to either ADM ratifying a match or a change of care plan. The support of Giedre Vilkaite (data analyst) ensures that the children

are appropriately tracked and informs our timeliness figures. Linkmaker profiles are reviewed to ensure that all children have 8 good quality photos and a video.

Examples of good practice are shared and those profiles requiring improvement are identified. Support is available from Alex McGuire (Marketing Officer) and Jemma Corcoran (Business Co-Ordinator) to ensure that profiles are up to the agreed standard. Marketing activities are discussed and implemented for specific children which includes specific social media campaigns, creating bespoke pages for the children on our website and including the children at our activity days and Discovery Events.

Adopters waiting are discussed as part of the monthly family finding meeting to ensure that all options have been considered for our children.

We hold Discovery Events on a bi- annual basis, where approved adopters have access to a secure video link where they can watch bespoke videos from social workers and foster carers about the children who are waiting.

Getting to Know You events are also held where Adopters can meet children waiting in an informal party like atmosphere. Two planned each year however only one was held this fiscal year due to a lack of adopters available.

This, alongside increasing the data we collect about children in the earlier stages of their adoption journey, has supported us to improve our service.

The approach of the family finding meetings continues to be successful in ensuring that children are placed within the region. 55% of our children were placed within Family Adoption Links last year. This is a reduction from 80% the previous year but is reflective of the challenges in recruiting adopters and approved adopters often having a tighter criterion. However, for the children that have been placed within FAL we have confidence that we know our adopters and children well and that there has been some regional financial saving in the cost of using interagency placements.

2.7 Post Adoption Support

Adoption support is another key workstream and is led by Sharon Clarke (Service Lead) from Lincolnshire. It builds on the practice delivered within the aforementioned workstreams. All partners have a different post adoption support offer and that is likely to remain the case. The ambition is for all adopters at the point of initial contact to have information about the support available with the website signposting the local details. The group is developing a core offer which establishes a starting point for both prospective and registered adopters and is informed by shared practice expertise from across the region. As part of this work and in addition, the workgroup has focused on the following areas.

- Post order training with direct access to the training hub offering a range of relevant training courses
- Establishment of the Adopter Hub which has co production at its heart and ensures that FAL engages actively with adopters
- Development of Collabor8 an online community for young people in place to offer, both support and ensure that the child's voice is central to our service direction.
- Provision of Thrive a regular newsletter for Adopters
- Working with Virtual schools across the partnership to develop and deliver the Education Passport

2.8 Early Permanence

The Early Permanence workstream is headed up by Lorraine Tavener from Northampton Children's Trust.

As with adoption support, this is an area of practice that has considerable Government focus and is frequently a key line of enquiry of OFSTED inspections. For a partnership RAA it is complex given the different court jurisdictions and established local practices.

The partnership reflects these differences and there is a variation in how well embedded it's in childcare planning. Apart from some geographically compact areas, national work on Early Permanence has concentrated on establishing good practice models and developing consistent forms, assessments, training and support to carers.

2.9 Keeping in Touch

Considerable research has been undertaken into the positive impacts on identity for adopted children when they are able to maintain some level of ongoing interaction with birth family. Central to the success of this agenda is the role of each agency in modernising practice, supporting development of professional values, providing knowledge and promoting good practice within wider children's services. This will better ensure that adopters are well prepared to support birth family connections, and our children and birth families are well supported to be safe and enjoy those connections.

FAL have established a Keeping in Touch workstream group to consider key themes to develop regionally, and this is led by Louise Caslile. This workstream meets bi-monthly, with clear Terms of Reference and pulls together a group of managers and practitioners who are committed to the modernisation of adoption and working in line with the national Maintaining Relationships agenda.

2.10 Data

Data management is overseen by the Data Analyst and has been invaluable in supporting local and regional information and provision of ASGLB data.

3. Our service – Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Permanence Team

The role of the Permanence Team is to work alongside colleagues in locality teams to progress plans for children where adoption may be required. Permanence team social workers also undertake all family finding activity for children who need permanence via adoption.

Permanence social workers are co-allocated to work with children where a decision has been made to twin- or triple-track their care plan, meaning that multiple options are being considered for the child, usually remaining with their birth parent(s), moving to live with a wider family member, or adoption if neither of the other options is possible. Permanence social workers complete Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) which draw together all the assessments that have been completed and provide a comprehensive assessment of the child's needs. These reports are presented to the Agency Decision Maker where the recommendation is that adoption is in the best interests of the child.

When children have a plan of adoption which is agreed in court by way of a Care Order and Placement Order, permanence team social workers become the allocated worker for the child.

They are responsible for statutory social work visits and reviews as well as all family finding and matching activity for the child or children.

Leicestershire County Council uses Linkmaker, a secure online platform, to create and upload bespoke profiles for children. Permanence team workers collaborate with colleagues using Linkmaker to search for potential adoptive matches, communicate with adopters locally and nationally and share information securely to progress placements for children. Leicestershire County Council uses Linkmaker for all our children, whether they are matched 'in-house', with adopters approved by LCC, 'regionally' with our partners in Family Adoption Links, or in 'interagency' matches with other Regional or Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

Permanence team social workers present identified matches to the Adoption Panel, prepare transition plans and support agreements to help the child move to their adoptive family, and support the placement until the point of Adoption Order.

The team's workforce additionally includes a dedicated Life Story Support Worker and two support workers. Our Life Story Support Worker provides extensive specialist work for children in their transition to adoption; this includes completing direct work with children, drafting Life Story books, and offering 'telling and explaining' sessions to adopters to prepare them for the ongoing life story work they will do with their children. Last fiscal year our Life Story worker completed 25 life story books, increase of 7 from the year before and 36 telling and explaining sessions. The support workers are responsible for a wide range of activities, from ensuring Linkmaker is monitored regularly, completing children's profiles, running activities and events throughout the year to support our adopters, foster carers and children. They host Foster Tots where Foster Carers can attend a monthly stay and play session and access support from professionals and peers as they prepare to move their children on. The support workers hold 'Photo Shoot Days' during school holidays. These days involve a variety of toys, games and props that allow the children to enjoy themselves and photos taken are of relaxed children having fun. This has been positively received by foster carers and attendance is high. Adopters and their younger children are able to attend the Busy Butterflies stay and play group that is run jointly by Leicestershire and Leicester City.

The support workers regularly receive praise and recognition from adopters, professionals and first families. **'The cultural heritage support plan for N re: E was really good and should be shared with everyone'**. Isabelle had put this together.

Isabelle also starred in an video as part of National Adoption Week and received a lot of praise for her inspirational story.

Ohana is a group for first families where they can meet for mutual support and help with writing letters to their children. Although attendance remains small the support received is valued.

"Vicki has done fantastic work with both parents, they are attending Birth parents counselling and engaged in letterbox which I feel has gone a long way in helping them process everything."

Our aim is to increase attendance so more parents/first family members have a safe place to talk where they can be heard and understood. Our leaflet advertising the group goes out to birth parents at the point of a Best Interest Decision being made and then is resent when reminders about Letterbox contact are sent. We remain passionate about ensuring children and their First Families remain in meaningful contact.

In addition to day-to-day operations, the team continues to be committed to ongoing developmental projects such as the introduction of Sibling Events, Keeping in Touch aimed at promoting contact between children and their First Families after adoption, Family Network Meetings and, further embedding of the Trauma Informed methodology in our practice. Team members have participated in workshops to develop therapeutic practice and offered training to foster carers.



L's transition to her adoptive family was described by S as 'amazing', they felt listened to in the planning process and that their experience and knowledge of L's needs was trusted.



So brilliantly written, balanced and positive on Contact and Progress in Care. Gives a brilliant impression of the FAL Leicestershire as a supportive, honest and professional organisation.



"Wow, thank you so much for such an informative response! I'll most certainly sign up to make finding me easier if, when and should he ever want to contact me directly after turning 18.



I wanted to share that the paperwork for the match was really well put together and through, an example of good practice to share.

3.2 Recruitment, assessment, and preparation of adopters

The Adoption Service works closely with professional colleagues to provide a full recruitment, assessment, and preparation service to adopter applicants in Leicestershire.

People who are interested in adoption can find information on the Family Adoption Links website. Any enquiries about becoming an adopter are handled by the Recruitment and Marketing team initially, which is a shared resource with the Fostering Service. Potential adopters are then able to access adoption information events run by the recruitment team and, following this, request an initial visit before completing a formal Registration of Interest (ROI).

The Assessment and Support Team (AST) support workers complete all Initial Visits to help potential adopters begin their two-stage journey to becoming prospective adopters. Stage One of the process is managed by the AST, with support workers completing statutory checks. At

this point social workers begin delivering preparation training directly to applicants, and this work continues throughout stage 2.

Our face-to-face preparation training is run in partnership with Leicester City and regularly receives positive feedback. When adopters progress to Stage Two, a social worker from AST is allocated to complete the home study and present their recommendations to the adoption panel in a Prospective Adopter Report (PAR). The majority of the social workers are trained in Attachment Style Interviewing which informs future matching activity.

In 2024/25 45 Initial Visits were completed, 29 of which resulted in a Stage 1 start compared to 2023/24 when 44 Initial Visits were completed, 21 of which resulted in a Stage 1 start.

During this period 25 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, compared to 14 during the previous fiscal year.

After adopters are recommended for approval at panel and formally approved by the Agency Decision Maker, all case responsibility remains allocated to a social worker in the Assessment and Support Team who has assessed them. AST social workers go on to support prospective adopters through matching and placement, continuing to work alongside the family until the point of Adoption Order.

As with our children, Leicestershire County Council uses Linkmaker to support our adopters to identify potential matches. All of our adopters are encouraged to create a profile on Linkmaker. FAL is part of a nationwide group who are looking at improving the quality of Linkmaker in supporting matches between children and adopters.



I just want to say in an email because I wouldn't be able to get the words out in person without being a blubbing wreck!

You have been AMAZING!



It is with great pleasure that I write this reference for Grace, who has been an exceptional social worker and an invaluable support to us throughout our adoption journey. From the very beginning at Stage 2 of the process, Grace has been by our side, offering unwavering guidance, patience, and expertise that have made an otherwise daunting process feel manageable and achievable.

Grace has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure we felt supported every step of the way. She took the time to thoroughly explain each stage, breaking down complex details into clear, understandable terms. Whenever we found ourselves unsure or overwhelmed, Grace never hesitated to go the extra mile, taking time out of her busy schedule to provide clarity and reassurance. Her ability to empathize with our concerns while keeping us focused and informed has been nothing short of extraordinary.





I want to offer some positive feedback to you both on the practice and panel paperwork for this match, which is completed to a high standard and is good balance between factual information and analysis. I got a strong sense of the family and how D has been matched with them and vice versa.

The direct work with H is really really good and shows the relationship that has been developed with him over time and how his preparation has progressed over the adoption journey.



3.3 Adoption Panels

Adoption panels are chaired by an Independent Chair in line with regulatory requirements, supported by a vice-chair, independent members, social work representatives and an agency adviser. Leicestershire has a stand-alone Agency Decision Maker who is responsible for ensuring that they have considered all the information presented to them before making a final decision.

Adoption panels make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker regarding the suitability of prospective adopter applicants, adoption matching, and adoption plans for children who are relinquished for adoption. All matches for Leicestershire children are considered at this panel.

Leicestershire County Council hold adoption panels once or twice per month in response to service requirements. During the period 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025, panel met on 21 occasions hearing a total number of 51 cases. This is an increase on the previous year (1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024) when panel met on 18 occasions, hearing 49 cases and looking at the year prior to this it seems there is a continued upward trajectory.

25 applications and 24 matches were presented to panel during this period, as well as one withdrawal and one retrospective approval of a Scottish adopter for the purposes of a match. One application was a negative recommendation which was supported by panel and agreed by ADM as a qualifying determination.

In the previous year there were 14 applications (approvals) and 26 matches ; therefore, the number of applications have increased and matches have decreased (by two) during this period.

Despite the reduction in the number of applications to adopt Leicestershire has increased the numbers of Adopter households this fiscal year.

3.4 Post Order support

Support Offer

Pre and post adoption support is provided in several ways within Leicestershire. An adoption social worker offers support up to three years post adoption order, especially in cases where adoption breakdown or disruption is a threat. This is set out in legislation (Adoption and

Children Act 2002/Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005) as all placing authorities are required to provide support to a child, they have placed for adoption for the first three years.

We have a dedicated support worker who makes first contact with any adopter approved by Leicestershire at the point of 6 weeks post placement. This is the point when research suggests that post placement depression can become evident. During this visit the support worker will spend a significant amount of time discussing any concerns or issues, they will inform the adopters about our post adoption support offer and email a pack of useful contacts and information. During this financial year we have completed 41 Post Adoption Support assessments, submitted 258 applications to ASF (of which 156 were top up applications). We have continued to provide play therapy to 10 children who have received a total of 161 sessions between them. We have also provided Therapeutic Life Story work to 4 children and Parent support sessions for 5 families.



- Hello Sheryl, I hope you are well, it has been a little while since our last communication.

I just wanted to say a big 'Thank You' for your contribution to K's memory book which we received a couple of weeks ago.

Thank you again for everything you did for K, Sand I are extremely grateful.



And again, as always, thank you so much for all you have done for us. Even if we have not had much contact in recent years just knowing you were there made all the difference. We knew we were protected and supported. Thank you



Alongside these sessions, C has been undertaking life story work, which has been delivered in a thoughtful and paced manner to titrate C's exposure to potentially distressing information. This approach has been vital in ensuring that C can engage with her emotions in a safe and manageable way.

C has reported finding the life story work and her relationship with Harriett helpful indicating the importance of relational consistency in her therapeutic journey.



The support worker is Theraplay (level 2) trained, if necessary, she can remain involved to support managing behaviour and completing direct work with children. She can also escalate any worries to the allocated social worker, who can then utilise the expertise of the post adoption service to inform their support package.

There are four Post Adoption Support social workers within the team with a variety of expertise, from DDP (level 2) to Person centred therapy. All are trauma and attachment trained and specialist training is provided as part of their continuous development. Once a case is allocated for Post Adoption Support the social worker completes a Post Adoption Assessment of Need, which enables a thorough assessment of support needs and recommendations for therapeutic and non-therapeutic interventions. Therapeutic provisions and specialist assessments are commissioned through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), providing that eligibility criteria is met.

The Post Order Support Team, which incorporates Post Adoption and Post SGO support have had access to an in-house Play Therapist who works individually with adopted children. She also created a support call model named 'Parent Support 6' as a result of the covid crisis. This was funded through the ASF and was used to support parents in acute stress over the phone. Its success has meant that we are continuing this offer. PS6 has continued to provide valuable short-term intervention, usually whilst ASF funding is awaited for more specific therapy to commence.

A quarterly newsletter from FAL for adopters and internally for SGO carers is distributed and receives a high level of positive feedback from adopters and professionals. The team also runs two activity events per year, in the summer and at Christmas. These are well attended and receive positive feedback.



Well organised and signposted, relaxed atmosphere



Well organised. Some nice activities planned and not too overwhelming for the kids.



Despite only being required by legislation to provide support for the first three years post granting of an Adoption Order, Leicestershire continues to offer lifelong support so after the three-year period, adopters can contact the team directly if they require specific adoption support. For those cases where there is a chance of a child being placed back into care or there is child protection concerns it remains that support is provided via First Response Children's Duty and Family Safeguarding and Family Help services. The post support team will continue to work as part of a team around the family, offering support to the child and parents relating to the therapeutic needs of the adopted child.

Birth Parents are routinely offered support prior to the adoption of their children. This support is offered through a leaflet provided at the point of ADM ratifying a care plan of adoption. Birth parents are offered 6 sessions with an independent counsellor, we currently commission three such counsellors who are based in different areas around the county to support with accessibility. The Authority will continue to review this service to ensure that the offer to Birth Parents is meaningful.

The Post Adoption Support Team liaises with the Virtual School and training is offered to schools particularly around attachment issues for adopted children and how to successfully manage these in the school setting. The training is highly valued by schools who report a change in staff behaviour and interaction with children which in turn impacts on the children's

ability to engage in education. Collaborations with the Peer Adoption Support group LAFS is also valuable and enables a connection with the wider adopter network. A monthly CAMHS consultation is held for any adopted child where a clinical nurse can offer advice, and services provided by CAMHS.

The demand for Post Adoption Support continues to grow in all areas. Leicestershire has a Therapeutic Support Budget that can be accessed to support children emotionally prior to adoption. Each child can have an initial payment of up to £450 with a further £450 being available if required. The Service Manager for Children in Care has a role in monitoring applications and the progress of any therapy commissioned.

Adoption Support Fund

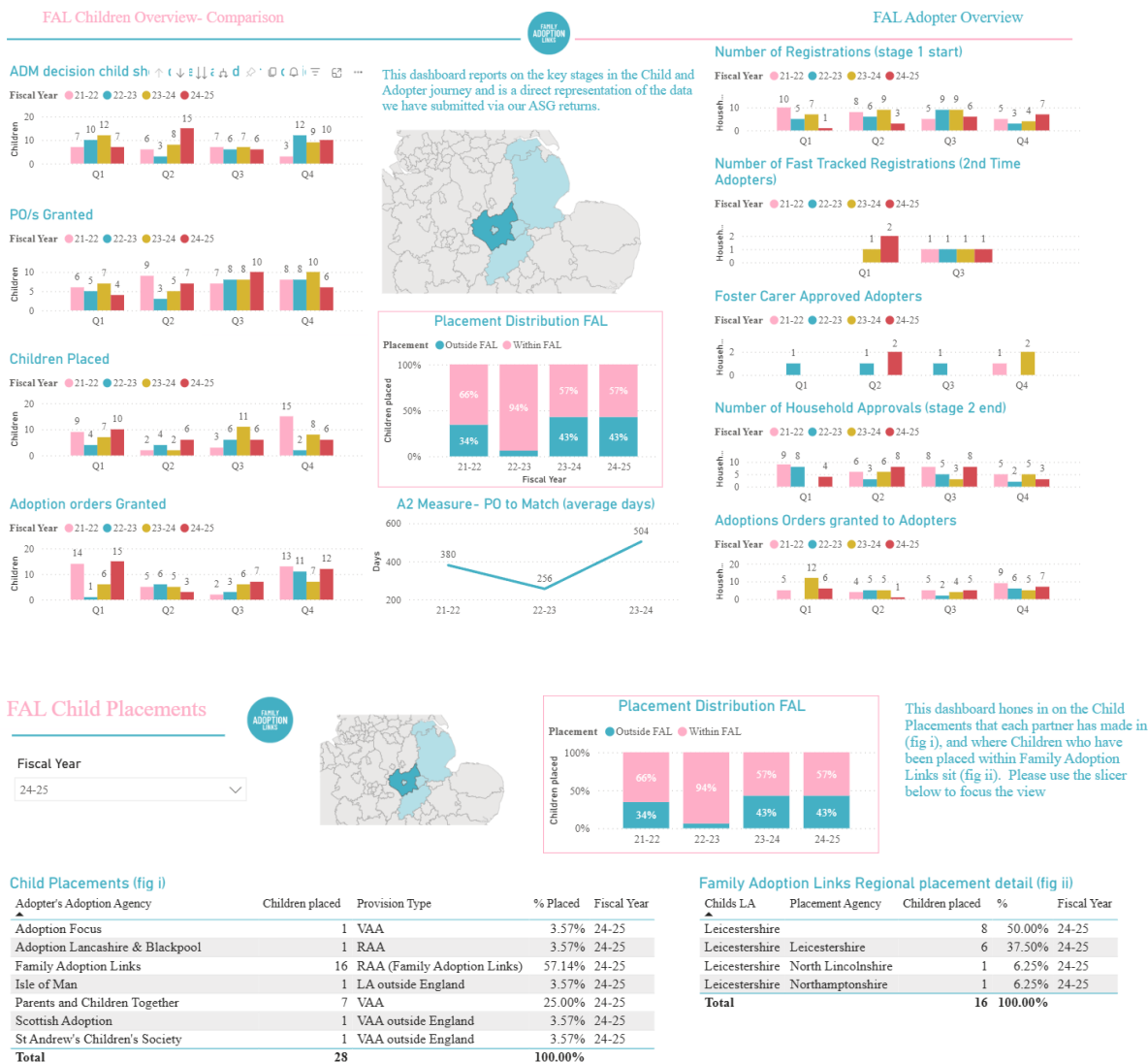
To 31st March 2025, Leicestershire has drawn down £1,622,481.01 from the Adoption, Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is an increase in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£1,651,340.16) and represents support to 547 families, up from 505 in 2023/24. The total amount of drawn down also includes top up applications where therapy is assessed as being needed to be continued once the initial therapeutic period has ended. Leicestershire has successfully trained workers therapeutically to ensure a better provision of services. Any money accumulated from the ASGSF ensures that workers receive clinical supervision alongside regular supervision to ensure that their therapeutic practice is ethical and appropriate. Some of the most complex cases may be co-worked by the Locality Team with support from the Post Adoption Support Worker. In such cases an assessment will be conducted, and an application may be made for appropriate therapeutic services through the Adoption Support Fund.

Birth Records Counselling

Birth Records Counselling is a service provided to adults who have been adopted and wish to access their records and understand their life story prior to being adopted. A social worker reads the records and provides a detailed account to the adoptee alongside therapeutic emotional support that enables the adult to process their journey. This service continues to be highly successful, and adoptees regularly provide positive feedback. 20 referrals were received for this service during 2024/25. This is a decrease from 28 during the previous year. Intermediary services where adult adoptees are supported to find and meet their birth parents is not carried out by Leicestershire. Some initial advice may be given but as with other Local Authorities we signpost adoptees who request this service to third sector agencies.

4. Performance

The overall performance shows an increase in the amount of Best Interest Decisions being made from 36 in 2023-24 to 38 in 2024-25, with the amount of Placement Orders being granted reducing slightly from last year (27 in total) Adoption staff continue to be regularly challenged during proceedings about the possibility of successfully finding adopters and we are seeing an increase in the numbers of birth parents being given leave to apply to have a Placement Order revoked. 28 children were placed with adopters; this remains the same as the previous fiscal year. We have seen a significant rise in the granting of Adoption Orders with 37 being granted in 2024/25 compared to 24 the previous year. 57% of our children have been placed within the Family Adoption Links Region, this figure remains the same as last year and continues to be reflective of the shortage of adopters nationally.



This data demonstrates the equivalent use of FAL placements as the year before. 14 of our children have been placed with Leicestershire adopters and 1 with Northamptonshire and 1 with North Lincolnshire. 1 child has been placed with another RAA, a further child was placed with a Local Authority outside of England with the remaining 10 children being placed with VAAs. During the fiscal year 2023/24 12 external interagency placement were required. This reflects the national position in that there is a shortage of adopters and placements are taking longer to find.

Children waiting

At the end of March 2025, there were a total of 33 children with a Placement Order who have not yet been placed with their adoptive families. This is broken down into 23 male children and 10 females. Within this there are 9 sibling groups of 2. 9 of these children have links with prospective adopters. 4 children have a change of care plan decision, and we are in the process of applying for a revocation of the Placement Order. One child is remaining with his foster carer under the auspices of a Special Guardianship Order, one child is remaining with their foster carer on a long-term basis, the other 2 children will remain on a Care Order but in different fostering placements. This is due to the complexities around their physical and

emotional needs. We currently have 20 children who we are actively family finding for, this includes 10 children are 'harder to place' as a result of their additional needs (health and arising from trauma experiences), which also includes 4 sibling groups of 2 children. All children waiting are discussed at local and regional family finding meetings, are profiled at Discovery and Exchange Events and have also been invited or attended the Regional Activity Day.

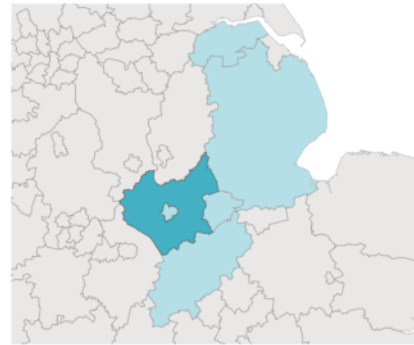
FAL Adopter Distribution

Fiscal Year

24-25

Adopter Placements (fig i)

Child Provision Type	Households linked	%	Fiscal Year
LA (VAA)	1	5.56%	24-25
LA	17	94.44%	24-25
Total	18	100.00%	



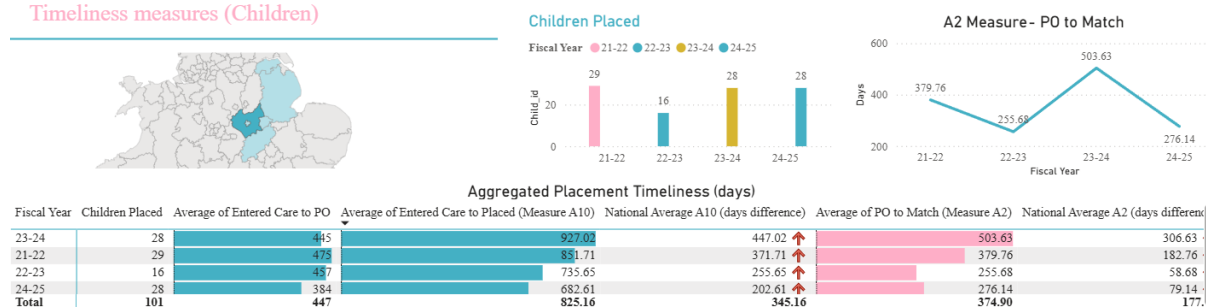
Adoption Placement detail (fig ii)

Adopter LA	Child LA	Provision Type	Household Count	Children Placed	%
Leicestershire	Birmingham	LA (VAA)	1	2	5.56%
Leicestershire	Leicester (FAL)	LA	2	6	11.11%
Leicestershire	Leicestershire (FAL)	LA	11	22	61.11%
Leicestershire	Lincolnshire (FAL)	LA	3	8	16.67%
Leicestershire	Northamptonshire (FAL)	LA	1	2	5.56%
Total			18	40	100.00%

This data gives information relating to Leicestershire Adopters who have had placements of children from both inside and outside of the Local Authority. Leicestershire adopters have provided placements for 11 Leicestershire children and 5 Family Adoption Links children

2024- 2025 Child placement timeliness:

Timeliness measures (Children)

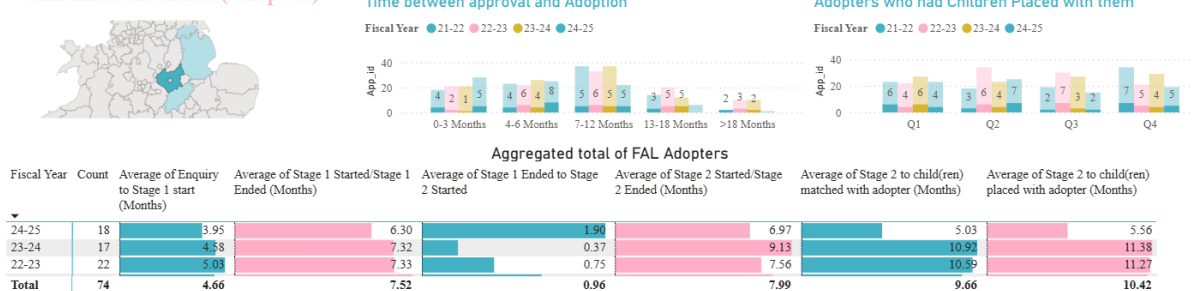


Despite to the challenges that the service faces in family finding, the above chart demonstrates that there has been an improvement in timeliness in all areas, with the significant area of improvement being in the timeliness of the granting of a Placement Order and children being matched, reducing from 503.63 days during 2023/24 to 276.14 days in 2024/25. This demonstrates that for most children we are able to match quickly despite a challenging landscape, but for some children their wait is significantly longer. All children waiting are routinely discussed at least twice monthly, with Service Manager oversight of those children waiting longest.

Line Level Detail of the 24-25 Children waiting over 6 months:

Gender	Age	Date of Placement Order	Notes
Male	7 years	03.03.22	Experienced an adoption disruption – revocation of Placement Order being applied for.
Male	6 years	08.12.23	Older child – remaining with foster carer under a SGO – Placement Order to be revoked
Male	4 years	18.05.22	Health uncertainties and part of a sibling group - revocation of Placement Order being applied for – remaining with current foster carer
Male	3 years	18.05.22	Health uncertainties and part of a sibling group - revocation of Placement Order being applied for – new placement required
Male	2 years	13.10.23	Health uncertainties
Male	4 years	08.12.23	Health complexities
Female	2 years	28.02.24	Father requesting re-assessment
Male	4 years	08.03.24	BAME Sibling group
Female	2 years	08.03.24	BAME Sibling group
Female	4 years	27.09.23	Health uncertainties and part of a sibling group
Male	2 years	27.09.23	Health uncertainties and part of a sibling group

Timeliness measures (Adopters)



This data demonstrates timeliness of our Adopter Journey. There continues to be an improvement in most areas, with a slight increase in the length of stage 1. This is due to some delay in receiving required external information for some applicants. A further slight increase in the period between Stage 1 ending and Stage 2 starting is down to one adopter taking a break for personal reasons before starting Stage 2. The majority of prospective adopters experience a positive assessment experience that is timely and successful.

The 1-year trend data highlights an improvement across all three key performance indicators, although some of our children are waiting longer on average to achieve permanence. It must be noted that the cohort of children who need adoption is small, and the average easily distorted by outlying data; a few children who wait significantly longer mean that the average is increased even whilst most children are achieving permanency in a timely way. Cases where the children have waited longer for permanency have been explored individually and we are satisfied that the delays for these children have been unavoidable. It can take longer to identify the right adoptive matches for children who have complex needs and who are in sibling groups; Leicestershire County Council nevertheless continues to pursue adoption for these children whilst it remains in their best interests.

The adoption service is keen to reduce further the time taken to achieve permanence for children and all children who have not had a placement identified within FAL after 12 weeks of the granting of a Placement Order are brought to the attention of the Service Manager and considered for an Interagency national search. We are creative with family finding and our Linkmaker profiles are consistently of a high standard. Our response rate to expressions of interest from adopters within 7 days is regularly at 100% and each child has a monthly update included in their files that details all family finding activity that has taken place that month. We use specific social media campaigns to generate interest in our children and have our regional activity days and Discovery events. Children's profiles are also taken to national and regional exchange events although these are proving to be an increasingly challenging form of family finding as there are often very few adopter households who attend with a large number of children being presented. One event in London saw over 100 children's profiles with only 10 adopter households attending throughout the day. We continue to review our family finding activity and are part of the Adoption England National Family Finding Workstream.

4.1 Adoption Plans

Where the Local Authority proposes a plan of adoption for a child, this plan must be presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a decision that adoption is in their best interests. In this period 38 children were subject to Best Interest Decisions. 13 of those children are waiting

for final court hearings where Placement Orders (PO) may be made to allow their placement with adoptive families.

There has been a significant decrease in the average days from BID to PO which reflects the assessments completed during pre-proceedings and an increased focus on keeping proceedings within timescale. The decrease is 64.8 days standing at 110.68 days compared to 175.54 days the previous year. Children who have a BID, but no placement order are tracked by managers to understand delays. Such delays are most commonly attributable to court processes and to additional assessments being completed where family members come forward to be considered to care for the child/ren at a late stage in proceedings.

National minimum standards require Local Authorities to track the time between children coming into care and receiving a Best Interest Decision. National minimum standards also require tracking from the time the Local Authority proposes a plan of adoption to the point of a BID. Children continue to wait longer than average in Leicestershire County Council from the point of coming into care to the point of BID and further work is needed to understand the reasons for this. However, BIDs are made in a timely way once the Local Authority has confirmed a plan of adoption.

Children are referred to the permanence team, as above, where a twin- or triple-tracking decision is made as part of childcare proceedings. Permanence Team managers meet regularly with colleagues in locality teams to track the progress of children who are in proceedings or who may shortly enter proceedings. The Children's Decision-Making panel continues to be chaired by the Head of Service for Fieldwork and is the forum where decisions for pre-proceedings and issuing of care proceedings is made. This provides senior management oversight of cases that may progress to a permanence decision of adoption. These processes help the adoption service plan for children's expected needs and assist decision-making regarding the recruitment of adopters.

When children are relinquished for adoption by their birth parents, these plans must be presented to the Adoption Panel. There have been no relinquished children during this fiscal year

At the 31st March 2025 there were 46 children with a best interest decision of adoption, of which 33 had Placement Orders granted by the court. This is an increase from the year before when 33 children had a best interest decision and 27 had Placement Orders. Eight children have an ethnicity other than White British. 17 children are female and 29 are male. 24 are part of sibling groups who require adoption (12 sibling groups of 2) this does not include children who have siblings with different care plans.

Prior to the making of a Placement Order, Permanence Team social workers ensure they are familiar with the needs of the child or children and complete early scoping to identify any potential adoptive links for the child. Formal family finding work is then initiated at the point of Placement Order but can be paused if there are additional court proceedings required.

Early identification of potential links and matches is carried out in internal family finding meetings. Children may also have anonymous profiles created to facilitate early linking with Leicestershire adopters as well as adopters across the Regional Adoption Agency. Leicestershire County Council seek to place children with our own approved adopters initially, then consider adopters within our region before looking to other interagency placements including Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs). Children's profiles are uploaded to Linkmaker and shared securely with professionals and prospective adopters to allow potential links to be explored. Regional family finding activity is in process, with regular matching meetings taking

place. This continues to be successful in identifying matches for 16 Leicestershire children; the family finding work will continue to grow in the year ahead.

Leicestershire County Council has continued to attend exchange events during the year and has also used other creative online marketing campaigns to support recruitment of specific adopters for some 'harder to place' children, categorised by the DfE as children in sibling groups, with disabilities or aged 5 and over.

5 children were placed under Fostering for Adoption protocols during this period, although this continues to be tracked through attendance at Children's Decision-Making meeting (CDM) and is considered upon the referral being received. The purpose of the CDM is for discussions to be held about concerns of safety and legal advice is received about court thresholds.

4.3 Children Placed and Adopted

28 children have been placed with their adoptive families during the year, a increase of 6 against the previous year, we have a small cohort of children who have been delayed in their formal matching as identified previously in this report. Leicestershire children, on average, wait longer than the national average between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. This is partly due to the shortage of adopters available but also that Leicestershire strives to make the 'best possible match' for our children.

37 Adoption Orders were finalised in the year 2024/25, an increase from the previous year when 24 orders were made.

4.4 Adoption Approvals

In 2024/25, 41 Initial Visits were completed, 29 of which resulted in a Stage 1 start. This is a decrease of 3 Initial visits, but an increase of 8 Stage 1 starts from the previous year

25 adopter households were approved in this period, compared to 14 the previous year.

25 applications have been presented to Adoption Panel for approval. All adopter households who attended panel and were approved, 1 adopter household was presented with a negative recommendation which was upheld by the Agency Decision Maker. 8 single adopter households were assessed and approved. 6 adopters identified as LGBTQ+, 7 adopters were BAME and 1 adopter had a disability.

We continue to see improvement in the timeliness of completing adopter assessments. On average Stage one is now taking 6.3 months (down from 7.3 months last year) and Stage 2 taking on average 6.97 months compared to 9.13 months during 2023/24. The average between ending Stage 1 and starting stage 2 has increased from 0.37 to 1.9 months. This is due to one adopter household taking a break between the stages due to personal reasons. Key performance measures and monthly performance meetings continue to monitor this and explore reason for delay. In the majority of cases the delay has been caused in receiving information from outside agencies.

Clear matching expectations and planning for adoptive families from the point of their approval to the point of their match also improves the service we offer to families and, ultimately, to the children they can offer a home to. We continue to collate further data to better understand the adopter journey from approval to match, with consideration of any adaptations we may need to make for adopters who have protected characteristics. We are continuing to align our practice in this area with our regional partners.

4.5 Adoption Disruptions

There has been one disruption for a sibling group of two this fiscal year. A further adoptive placement broke down during introductions so is not officially a disruption. The children are currently in Local Authority care and receiving therapeutic support whilst we continue to family find. Leicestershire routinely holds Disruption Meetings in any placement breakdown. These are chaired by an independent person and any learning is incorporated in future planning. In both cases the independent chair concluded that the breakdowns were not foreseeable, and matching practices had been robust. Recommendations were made in potentially increasing the period of introductions for older children and considering unconscious bias when assessing potential adopters from a professional background.

5. Developments

5.1 Regional service delivery

The Regional Adoption Agency, Family Adoption Links, was newly formed as a partnership agreement during the year 2020/21. Operational managers across the region have developed and revised a Service Delivery Plan with clearly defined workstreams in order to promote regional collaboration and create workable cross-authority protocols.

Staff who work for Family Adoption Links are continuing to build relationships with their counterparts across the region and information sharing events for the whole staff group are run throughout the year.

5.2 First family support

The Local Authority has a duty to provide support for birth parents whose children are adopted. Previously Leicestershire adoption service ran a peer-support group as well as offering individual counselling sessions. This peer support group is in the process of being re-established.

Parents continue to be offered individual sessions which have been commissioned through three independent counsellors. The counsellors are placed around the county to support easier access. Each offers a series of six counselling sessions to birth parents.

Birth family members and wider family members are currently offered an information sharing meeting with our life story support worker, which allows them to share positive and significant information about themselves for their children in later life. Informal feedback from this is extremely positive, with birth families' members explaining that they were grateful to have the opportunity to share memories and keepsakes and thanking the worker for kindness at a difficult point in their lives.

5.3 Staying in Touch

The national drive on post Adoption Order contact with birth family is welcomed by Leicestershire County Council and is seen to be an intrinsic part of children growing up with a positive sense of identity and self-esteem.

We remain committed to promoting on going contact between children and their birth family when it is safe and appropriate to do so and already have a small number of adopters who actively promote this.

We have developed a Staying in Touch assessment tool that is embedded within Child Permanence Reports and also run sibling activity days. We are currently supporting 7 children through sibling contact and a further 3 with direct birth family contact.

5.4 Feedback

The adoption service gathers feedback from various people, including adult adoptees, adopters, foster carers, birth family members and other professionals. We continue to develop our work to ensure that:

- Children's voices are included in the feedback
- Feedback is sought routinely and sensitively at appropriate points in the process
- Feedback is used to develop and co-produce service improvement.

Surveys have gone out to Adopters to gain their voice in relation to the assessment process and to Special Guardians to understand the complexities of their situation. We also consult with Collabor8 who are a group of adopted children and young people and the Adopter Hub about policies and services. Feedback is routinely gained after assessment, matching and panel.

6. Complaints

Three complaints have been received during the year. Complaints are initially directed to the relevant team manager for a response and can be escalated where the individual remains unsatisfied. Adopters who receive negative decision about their suitability to adopt (a 'qualifying determination') are also able to appeal this decision by referral to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). In this year, no adopters have accessed the IRM to appeal a negative decision.

It is understandable that adopters are more likely to complain in situations where the Local Authority must make negative recommendations or requires time to complete additional assessments. When adopter applicants, prospective adopters and approved adopters raise issues with the service, both through formal complaints and informal discussion, these issues are always overseen by managers.

We are committed to being a learning organisation and ensure that we respond to queries as fully as possible. As a service we strive to be transparent and open with adopters and will always respond initially to any complaints by convening a meeting to try and address any concerns as quickly as possible. Any learning is discussed reflectively within the team and if appropriate changes are made to processes. The 5 complaints in relation the assessment process were in relation to delay. We now have an extra worker to complete initial visits and management oversight if those adopters in both stages of the assessment process is now much more robust.

7. Achievements

Leicestershire Adoption Agency continues to strive to deliver excellent services to our children. This was recognised by Inspectors during the Ofsted Inspection in April 2024 when

Leicestershire were rated as Outstanding. The permanence team complete all Child Permanence Reports for Leicestershire children. Reports are of a consistently high quality and social workers collaborate well with colleagues across the children's service to progress plans for children.

The recruitment and assessment of adopters who can meet the needs of our children continues to be an area for development, but this reflects a national picture of the challenges in identifying adopters for children with complex needs. Nevertheless, the service is committed to improving the adopter journey and continues to work closely in partnership with Family Adoption Links to improve recruitment figures.

The Post-Order team has developed its specialist work with a view to ensuring as many families as possible are able to access the help and resources they need. The team provide direct help and advice as well as facilitating access to therapeutic services via the Adoption Support Fund.

Social workers in the adoption service have access to specialist training and are supported to develop their skills. We are ambitious for our service, for our children and for our staff.

8. Recommendations for 2025/2026

Action	Person Responsible	By When
Continue working and developing alongside our colleagues in the Regional Adoption Agency, with specific and effective action plans agreed by operational leads and overseen by the Board. This will include being involved in the Peer review and also focussing on improving our Early Permanence offer and developing our Staying in Touch practices further	Service Manager	March 2026
Continued focus on the key performance indicators related to the assessment and recruitment of adopters, identify barriers to recruitment and learn from areas of good practice.	Service Manager and Assessment Team Manager	March 2026
Focus on timeliness for children by further developing our understanding of children's journey through care to the	Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers	March 2026

point of Best Interest Decision and increasing awareness of Early Permanence within our Safeguarding Teams		
To continue to develop our panel, ensuring that that panel members are appropriately trained to continue to meet the needs of the service provide robust scrutiny of the agency	Service Manager, Panel Advisor and Panel Chairs	March 2026
Continue to invest in developing processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development	Service Manager and FAL Marketing Officer	March 2026
To continue to develop the service offered to birth parents/first family members, including continued contact, if appropriate, after adoption through the Keeping in Touch agenda.	Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers	March 2026
To provide bespoke training and support opportunities to our Special Guardians and the children that they care for.	Service Manager and Post Order Team Manager	March 2026
To continue to drive the promotion of direct contact for children after adoption. This will include ensuring that all prospective adopters understand the importance of continued relationships with their first family and that appropriate support is given during the initial stages of setting this up.	Service Manager and Permanence Team Managers	March 2026



Michelle Robinson

September 2025

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 4
NOVEMBER 2025

FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the activity of the Fostering Service for the period 2024 -2025.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Under the Fostering Regulations 2015, Fostering Agencies are required to provide an annual report to the executive to note the activity and work of the Fostering Agency (Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service).
3. The Fostering Annual Report provides information regarding the activity of the Service during 2024/25.

Background

4. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Service, involving undertaking all statutory duties for the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
5. The Fostering Service is led by the Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care, Leaving Care, and is operationally managed by a Service Manager.
6. Six key areas are supported within the Service:
 - The recruitment of Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts and Independent Visitors;
 - The assessment of Foster Carers, Private Fostering, Supported Lodgings Hosts, Independent Visitors and Non-Agency Adoptions;
 - The post approval support and training of Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts, Private Foster Carers, and Independent Visitors;
 - The Fostering and Special Guardian Assessments of Kinship Carer
 - The post approval support of kinship care; and,
 - The additional support to families through the Dedicated Placement Support Team.
7. A copy of the full annual report is appended to this report.

Summary of Report

8. The report outlines the activity from each service area. Achievements over the year have included:
 - Approved 12 mainstream foster carers and one specialist carer, 13 in total, offering 20 foster homes for children and young people. This was set against a target of 14;
 - Approved five new Supported Lodgings Hosts;
 - Recruited 24 Independent Visitors;
 - Increased the number of Independent Visitors by 24, to a total of 87.
 - Held the 2nd 'Fostival' and the 3rd is planned for August 2026. This event is for foster carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts and Independent Visitors, giving them an opportunity to enjoy a two-day event, connecting with other carers and fostering colleagues, and taking part in well-being events hosted by the fostering team;
 - Registered and approved by Ofsted to run a 'Supported Lodgings Scheme,' with annual host reviews, training, and support provided to exceed required standards; and,
 - Reviewed and updated our Policies and Procedures to enable access to carers and hosts via Tri-x to guide and inform their practice with children and young people.
9. The Fostering Service is managed by a Service Manager and Assistant Service Manager. These roles ensure that both recruitment and retention receive the same high-quality management oversight and service development.
10. The Service has excellent staff retention and again has seen another year with a full staff compliment, without the need to use agency staff.
11. The Service has embedded and efficient ways to communicate with carers, ensuring carers are given the most up to date information from the Service, one of these being a private Facebook group, which is still used to disseminate information and to share good news stories, links to key research, good practice guidance and general wellbeing. This has been an excellent forum to deliver up to date information to families and helps to keep foster carers and supported lodgings hosts connected and able to utilise peer support whenever needed.
12. Placement stability remained high, and where emerging issues arose that could impact on placement stability these were quickly managed with a timely and dedicated team around the child to maintain the foster home.
13. A Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST), Independent Visitors, and other partners such as Children in Care Social Work team and Virtual School, work closely to support children and carers to maintain placements when emerging challenges arise.
14. An early emphasis on permanency has decreased Court Ordered Placements (s38.6) and increased Kinship Care Viability Assessments. Updated processes have resulted in fewer Regulation 24 Fostering Arrangements and kinship approvals, but requests for viability assessments continue to grow; last year, 281 Initial Viability Assessments (IVA's) were completed.

15. Considerable progress has been made within Kinship Assessments to collaborate with Family Safeguarding and Family Help, providing support for IVA's and assisting families in pursuing appropriate assessments and permanency solutions for children, including long-term fostering, Special Guardianship, and Child Arrangement Orders.
16. The Annual Report provides feedback from the whole service, highlighting how it progressed plans from last year and new targets for the forthcoming year.
17. Nationally, foster carer recruitment continues to decline, with fewer potential carers entering assessment and approval compared to pre-Covid numbers. The Fostering Network estimates a national shortage of over 2,000 carers.
18. Within Leicestershire, the Service continued to experience low numbers of carers coming through to assessment, but those who come through to assessment there has been a high conversion rate of 63% of prospective carers going through from inquiry, assessment to approval.
19. The Head of Service is currently leading a working group which is establishing a strategy for attracting new foster carers and support lodgings hosts into the service. Best practice from other local authorities alongside identifying strategies used by Independent Fostering Agencies has been researched to inform a set of options that will be presented to the Directorate Management Team to consider. This will be reported upon in the Annual report for March 2025 to March 2026.
20. The Service has focused on staying visible and available to foster carers, supported lodgings hosts, and colleagues. Throughout the year, events have been organised such as picnics, crafting events, and other activities to foster connections among carers and staff. Retention remains as important as recruitment, ensuring carers feel supported after approval.
21. In addition, the Service organised consultation events for carers to connect with managers, receive updates, and share feedback. Regular meetings are held with local foster carers and aim to revive the Leicestershire Foster Carers Association.
22. With support from the Council's media and communications team, the Service will maintain recruitment campaigns focusing on siblings, teenagers, and children with additional needs. Targeted campaigns will be run in order to address common misconceptions and highlight the benefits of fostering for the council versus private agencies.

Overview of targets and priorities for 2025/2026

23. The Service will continue to use all forms of media in intensive recruitment campaign to achieve the following stretch targets:
 - 17 Mainstream Carers.
 - Recruitment of 2 Specialist Carers.
 - Recruitment of 5 Supported Lodgings Hosts.
24. Although national recruitment is trending downward, the Service has experienced strong growth in enquiries and assessments this year and remain confident in meeting or exceeding our targets. Monthly performance meetings help us track trends and identify areas needing attention.

25. In addition to this, the Service has a planned programme of work that will include:
- Completing focussed audits on voice of the child to inform and influence future practice for both the workforce and carers;
 - Continue to develop trauma informed practice, for both staff and carers;
 - Continue to strengthen reflective practice and listening circles for foster carers to support their learning, development and support networks;
 - Develop mentoring scheme for kinship carers to develop their role;
 - Increase the knowledge base for staff by providing specialist training in life story work and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). This is a therapeutic model designed to support children who have experienced trauma, neglect, or disrupted attachments; and,
 - Continue to increase the Independent visitors scheme by 25 and exceed our target of 100 visitors.
26. Preparation will continue for the Ofsted inspection of Supported Lodgings Scheme. The Service is in a strong position going into this inspection.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

27. None

Equality Implications

28. These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children in foster care, including disabled children, young children and those from minority and harder to reach groups. The Fostering Service has a diverse compliment of staff with representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.
29. The Fostering Service has an Equality and Diversity Action Plan in place which ensures that all staff are enabled to feel safe and supported, in addition to working towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to tackling inequalities - including relevant research, data, Quality Assurance activity and engagement with children, young people and families.

Human Rights Implications

30. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2024/25

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LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



INTRODUCTION

The annual report on fostering provides a comprehensive overview of the year's progress, challenges, and achievements within the fostering service. This document is designed for all stakeholders, including foster carers, social workers, management, and external partners, offering a clear summary of key developments and future priorities.

Leicestershire Fostering Service is governed by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for fostering services.

The Fostering Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose are available to all staff, foster carers, supported lodgings hosts, young people, parents and other professionals.

Key Messages

- **Increased Placement Stability:** This year saw a notable improvement in placement stability, with more children experiencing longer-term, consistent care. This has contributed to better emotional and educational outcomes for young people in foster care.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** We recruited 13 new fostering households. Our target was 17, recognising the national downward trend in recruitment. We lost 21 fostering households due to:
 - Retirement from fostering
 - Children remaining post 18
 - Adoption of foster child
 - Life circumstances – health, separation making fostering no longer viable as enhanced support and training, have also reduced turnover rates.
- Our conversion whilst in assessment remains high 63%
- **Training and Development:** A comprehensive training programme was delivered, focusing on trauma-informed care, safeguarding, and compassion fatigue. Feedback from carers highlighted the value of practical workshops and peer support sessions.
- **Child-Centred Practice:** There has been a continued emphasis on listening to the voices of children and young people. Regular forums and feedback mechanisms have informed service improvements and policy updates.
- **Retention activities –** We held our second Festival with over 170 attending, held wellbeing events for our carers, activity days for our children who foster and our foster children.

Challenges

- **Demand for Placements:** The demand for foster placements continues to outpace supply, particularly for sibling groups, teenagers, and children with complex needs. Addressing this gap remains a priority.
- **Support for Carers:** While progress has been made, some carers report needing additional support, especially when managing challenging behaviours or navigating complex systems.
- **Transition to Adulthood:** Preparing young people for independence remains a challenge, with ongoing work to strengthen pathways and support networks for care leavers.
- Due to national shortage of adopters many of our babies are remaining with the foster carers for longer periods impacting on capacity and child's care planning
- Our staff retention remains high, with minimal staff turnover, evidencing staff morale remains high and committed to the service.

Looking Ahead

- **Expanding Carer Recruitment:** Continued investment in targeted recruitment campaigns, with a focus on underrepresented communities and specialist carers.
- **Enhanced Support Services:** Plans to introduce new support groups, respite care options, and digital resources for carers to support recruitment
- **Partnership Working:** Strengthening collaboration with health, education, and community partners to provide holistic support with recruitment activities
- **Innovation in Practice:** Continuing to develop our models of care, including therapeutic fostering and early intervention strategies.



Conclusion

The past year has demonstrated the resilience and dedication of everyone involved in fostering. While challenges remain, the commitment to providing safe, nurturing homes for children and young people is unwavering. By building on this year's achievements and addressing ongoing challenges, we aim to create even better outcomes in the year ahead.

Thank you to all foster carers, staff, and partners for your support and invaluable contributions.

The fostering service remains committed to improving the outcomes of young people through achieving permanency at the earliest opportunity, supporting families to enable children to remain within their communities.

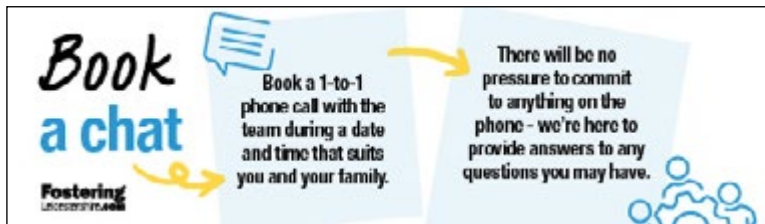
OUR FOSTERING SERVICE

Leicestershire Fostering Service is managed by:

- Joss Longman – Service Manager
- Heather Hughes – Assistant Service Manager
- Denise Betteridge – Recruitment Manager
- Emily Moss – Assessment Team Manager
- Rachael Young – Team Around the Child (TAC) Team Manager
- Rebecca Allen – Kinship Assessment Team Manager
- Fred Luneta – Kinship TAC Team Manager
- Helen Taylor – Dedicated Support Team
- Emma Lowe – Supported Lodgings Team Manager

FOSTERING RECRUITMENT

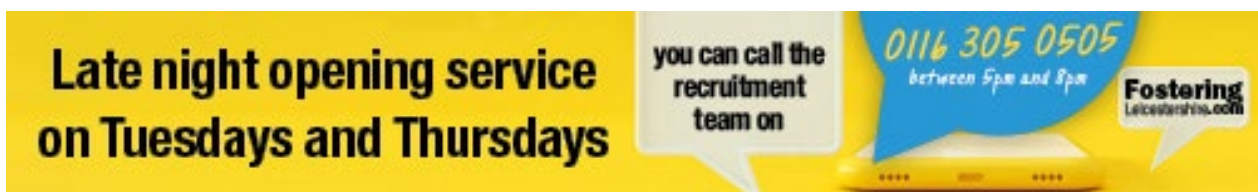
What did we do?



In August 2024 we introduced our new 'Book a chat' function!

Capturing RFI's 24 hours a day

Making it easy to arrange a time to discuss fostering



We introduced our 'Flexible hours' to be open 8-8 on Tuesdays and Thursdays

This also provides more opportunities for us to make contact with people who may be working during the daytime.

410 Requests for information to 46 Initial visits	11% conversion
19 Stage 1 starts from 46 Initial visits	41% conversion
12 approvals from 19 Stage 1 starts	63% conversion

Events attended in Leicestershire:

2024/25 was a difficult year for fostering recruitment on a national level, reflecting the national struggle to recruit carers.

During this time, our new dedicated Communications officer commenced her role and the positive impact made in our media activities and presence.



What we plan to do more of and / or do differently:

- Next year, we are hoping to acquire a fostering recruitment minibuss. This will provide transport for us and enable us to be more present at various events around the county. For example, we plan to attend 'Park-runs', festivals and pop-up events at local country parks:
- We will be focusing on the quality of enquiries from applicants. Ensuring that the content of our adverts are clear and concise, with suitable images. In addition, we will be maintaining our quality approach to potential applicants, ensuring that we only progress applicants to assessment where there is a high likelihood of them achieving approval. This practice also enables the service to make cost effective use of the Assessment team time by early 'filtering' at the front door. In addition, there is less potential for IRM issues and/or complaints to the service. This is underpinned by our 'transparent, clear and open' policy to potential applicants.
- We will be focusing on our USP (Unique selling points) which include the amazing array of support on offer for our foster carers and embellishing this on our website and social media presence.
- We will be growing our connections with local communities, ensuring we are present and available to all.
- We will continue to work with the whole service to understand the needs of our children and young people so that we can focus on the skills our foster carers need as well as searching for new opportunities to engage with potential applicants.
- We will continue to grow our 'we're not looking for Perfect people', just great people' image to encourage people to make contact at any stage of their interest. This will allow us to expand our 'keeping warm' connections.
- We plan to create digital application forms so that our applicants have the option to complete their lengthy applications online.
- We plan to generate more 'word of mouth' enquiries and explore how we can move this forward with our foster carers.

FOSTERING AND ADOPTION ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team continues to remain a stable team in terms of staff retention. We bid farewell to a long-serving member of the team and of LCC who was retiring, who had worked for the service for 35 years.

Team Development work continues via the Champions within the team, who represent areas such as Equality and Discrimination, Private Fostering, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and UASC Foster Carers, Signs of Safety, and Short Breaks.

In terms of Private Fostering, the team successfully led two lunch and learn training sessions in 2024-2025; reaching over 70 LCC staff members. An area for development in the coming year will be about the new Coram BAAF Form F. We also want to continue to develop practice around PACE and therapeutic parenting, as well as building upon the success of our provision of private fostering training to LCC staff.



Fostering Assessments

Approvals:

12 Mainstream Foster Carers	1 Specialist Carer	Total 13
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Our target for the year was 17 x mainstream approvals. 65% of all completed cases in 2024-2025 concluded with an approval. This percentage split remains comparable to previous years.

Any progression to assessment is processed via a PTAD (progress to assessment decision meeting) looking at strengths and vulnerabilities. A balanced approach is taken to all applications and a very much “can do approach” we also need to be realistic of applicants’ circumstances and ‘creative’ in our approach and understanding of peoples’ circumstances.

“Foster carers say that they feel well supported. They are offered consistent and reliable support from their social workers. Foster carers feel that their voices are valued and listened to by the service. There is a family ethos in the fostering service, and the foster carers understand and value this approach”
(Ofsted, 2024; 6).

Closures

The year saw 7 x closures in assessment.

Of these 7 x cases, 2 x households had a change of circumstances, and were therefore, no longer in a position to foster (these assessments we envisaged, would have concluded positively).

Our withdrawal / closure numbers for 2024 – 2025 were lower than previous years (7, compared to 8 in 2023-24, and 10 in 2022-23).

Private Fostering

We worked with 18 x private fostering households in 2024-2025.

- 10 x of these households we concluded positively, recommending that the carers were suitable private foster carers.
- 2 x of the 18 cases concluded with negative recommendations, due to safeguarding concerns (with 1 of the children in these situations becoming looked after because of the concerns).
- 5 x cases closed in assessment, with 1 of these being because the child became looked after, therefore, the private fostering arrangement ceased.
- 1 x case remained in assessment at the end of the financial year.

The quality of our private fostering assessments was praised within the 2024 LCC Ofsted Inspection. Inspectors met with assessing social workers from the team and subsequently reported:

‘Children who live in private fostering arrangements are assessed by knowledgeable and skilled social workers, who support them, visit them regularly and know them well (Ofsted, 2024: 5)’.

Quarterly meetings continue between managers across different service areas, with the aim of sharing updates about private fostering from different service areas. The Assessment Team also continues to work closely with a representative from the LCC Communications Team, in their effort to maintain impetus regarding our statutory obligation to raise awareness about private fostering.

Non-Agency Adoption

For many years the service had no dedicated worker for this role, and workers were managing these assessments against completing Form F assessment. This led to a significant backlog of families waiting – we now have a dedicated worker and a casual worker supporting these applications.

In 2024-2025, we saw 15 x households granted Adoption Orders. In 2024-2025, they completed 13 x initial visits. This rate of initial visits + completed assessments / Adoption Orders, allows us to continue to work through the existing (but far shorter) waiting lists. We saw the waiting list for initial visits (for new applicants) remains under 20 for much of the 2024 – 2025 financial year, which is positive.

Where a full assessment and submission to Court it deemed appropriate for a family, we would like to achieve completion of non-agency adoption applications (including Court Hearings) within two years of having received an applicant's notification to adopt, however, our average [median] within the 2024 – 2025 financial year was 2 years and 9 months due to the backlog.

Targets for 2025/26

- Recruitment of 14 mainstream foster carers (stretch of 17)
- Recruitment of 2 Specialist Carers
- Complete Non-Agency Adoptions from application to Court Order within 2 years
- Develop process with our adoption colleagues for overseas adoptions.
- Work with our colleagues within TAC to develop carers Terms of Approval / potential matching examples prior to approval.



TEAM AROUND THE CHILD

The statutory support and supervision for all Leicestershire County Council mainstream fostering households is delivered by Supervising Social Workers in the Team around the child Team. A team of experienced Social Workers (SSW) work tirelessly to support our foster families.

Whilst we have gained 13 fostering households this year, we have sadly seen 21 Fostering households resign or retire from fostering. We offer an exit interview to all carers and whilst we are sad to lose carers, we recognise that families have to resign for a number of reasons for their own wellbeing and family welfare. Reasons for resigning include personal circumstances, ill health, bereavement, or because the children they care for are remaining under a different arrangement- SGO, adoption or Staying Put. We are pleased that outcome is the best outcome for those families.

Achievements in 2024-2025

- Enhanced our Therapeutic Parenting training offer with involvement from Dr Anna May (Clinical Psychologist), Dyadic Development Psychology Practice and Reflective parenting, as well as joining CATCH training hub which offer carers a more varied approach to learning.
- Developed wellbeing resources for carers including mental health workshops, wellbeing days and training on compassion fatigue.
- Implemented wellbeing plans, which all carers and staff have been asked to discuss as part of supervision and support.
- Stability meetings take place where carers are struggling to meet the needs of children. We have seen an increase in requests for meetings during the year. TAC team works closely with the Dedicated Placement Support Team and Children's Social Workers in supporting the whole family.
- Following feedback from carers about the importance of their children we have a more robust programme for our Children who foster and have held events such as Laser Quest, Bowling and Crazy Golf which have been very well attended (35-40 children at each). We now include a session during the Skills to Foster' to speak to potential carers' children about fostering and to get to know a little more about them and their personalities.
- We work with a local charity called 'Yarn Bomb'. They offer carers and children in care a chance to reflect and develop self-care strategies and positive affirmations through creative activities.
- 'We are family' is our mantra and we continue to provide opportunities for the whole of LCC fostering to come together as a family. We have our annual Festival, regular picnics, park walks, easter egg hunt, bingo nights and a Celebration event. All which were well attended and had positive feedback.
- As an agency, carers inform us that their best form of support is from other foster carers. We have a number of locality support groups that meet monthly including a Men's Group. All of these are coordinated by carers themselves providing a safe space for carers to voice fears, anxieties and challenges. Joss, Heather and Rachael meet quarterly with Locality Support Group (LSG) Leaders to get updates from the group and to listen to feedback. The Service and Assistant Service Manager regularly meet with the Chair and Vice chair of LFCA (Leicestershire Foster carers Association). This Association supports carers in managing any areas of conflict with the service in order to find resolution.
- We have updated and written new policies and procedures in order to continue to improve practice and make it more consistent amongst practitioners. These policies before having Senior Managements approval are shared with LSG leaders and LFCA for feedback. We have introduced a new Individual risk assessment for all children in placements and a new policy for carers who were a couple and are now caring as a single carer
- TAC team Manager, SM and ASM are constantly reviewing how practice can be improved and carers better supported. We receive regular feedback from Panel – during a Quarterly business meeting to address any concerns. In addition, we regularly meet the Agency Decision Maker to discuss areas of improvement, carrying out audits to evidence areas of challenge or vulnerability.

The year ahead- 2025/26

- We are aware that the service is presented with the increasing challenge in finding suitable homes for children who are coming into care due to the lack of carers across the UK. With this in mind, we revisit carers that are on hold to explore if anything has changed whilst respecting their right to take a much-needed break. We intend to explore our list of respite carers to consider obstacles preventing them from being able to offer short term care and if there is anything more than service can offer to support this.
- TAC team work closely with recruitment team to myth bust around reasons why members of the public may rule themselves out of fostering, working with our current carers on recruitment campaigns and thinking about targeted campaigns for specific children who need a loving home. We intend to hold a special 'Foster carer fortnight' where carers will share positive stories of life in a fostering family and the difference this has made.
- We will continue to support therapeutic parenting approach to caring for children in care. We will be working with CAMHS to offer group consultations as a way of offering more carers access to specialist advice and support. Reflective parenting has received a lot of positive feedback and so we will be offering follow-on support groups on a drop-in basis.
- Our staff members who have completed DDP level 1 will be increasing their skill level by attending L2 training. We hope this will enhance the support offered to our carers.
- We will continue to focus on areas of practice which require attention, including helping carers to understand the traumatic impact of family time on children, their birth parents and carers. Another aspect which has a positive impact upon communication is the twice-yearly joint visits between CSW and SSW. This needs to be audited to ensure this is taking place.
- A focus audit will be taking place about how we capture the voice of children in care, throughout the year, and how this influences change. This is both for those children in care and those who are children of carers.
- Fostering Reviewing Officers will be asked to Quality Assure SSW review practice ensuring there is consistency of high standards across the service.
- Corambaaf encourages Foster Services to facilitate foster carers returning to foster panel on a regular basis. This is a way of ensuring independent oversight of service delivery, support and carers practice, as well as celebrating length of service as foster carers. We will consider introducing carers returning on a 5-yr cycle.



KINSHIP ASSESSMENT TEAM

Within our team there is a collective investment not only in the right outcomes for our children and families but in ensuring that we provide consistently high quality assessments, with individualised training and support at the core to meet the needs of carers and the caring needs of our children to provide them with that sense of belonging and self confidence in their identity and future to enable them to meet their own individual outcomes.

We cannot achieve that in isolation – and as a team we have developed a strong, cohesive and connected group together, who provide one another with the support to achieve and achieve within our own professional and personal awareness through a culture of training, mentoring and care that extends to one another. It is at the heart and core of who we are as a team – and it means that our outcomes are strong, evidence based and secure – and that the pressures placed on us are met and exceeded.

Our future aspirations for the forthcoming year is to continue to provide the consistency in high quality and individualised assessments to our carers, adapting and learning through their journeys and the themes that arise to ensure that assessments are relevant and effective not only in determining the care planning for our children, but in equipping our carers to meet childrens ongoing needs.

IVA Overview

Since this support offer has been in place there has been a year-on-year increase in the referrals and requests for the completion of IVAs.

Year 1 (2022/2023)	133 IVAs completed
Year 2 (2023/2024)	185 IVAs completed
Year 3 (2024/2025)	281 IVAs complete

Statistically:

Year 1-2 had a	39% increase
Year 2-3 had a	52% increase

Overall from April 2022 - March 2025 this is a 111% increase in the volume of referrals being received and completed.

Assessment overview

We have completed 178 assessments (42 we carried into the current financial year), these are the assessments either in pre-proceedings or proceedings – of those only 7 have become long term looked after as Kinship TAC families – with the remainder of our positive assessments leading to SGO, child arrangements order or children continuing to be cared for by their parents – but with options within their family where-ever possible. From the 2024/2025 cohort of assessments 39 SGO orders have been made directly from the assessments completed by this team and leading straight into orders.

We continue to work in partnership with our locality teams and legal services extending our assessment offer to include those private law SGO applications made directly by the carers. We undertook 22 Private SGO assessments last year. This work has enabled carers to have applications progressed in a timely manner and has significantly reduced the delay and drift on private applications that were pending assessment in other teams. This is a growing area, with 12 private applications in assessment for the 1st quarter of 2025/2026.

Private Fostering Post Approval Support

The team has a dedicated social worker in place to support and enable our private foster carers, with consistency and oversight in supporting them in their role as private foster carers, and often into the transition to holding longer term CAO orders for the children in their care.

Feedback:

"I feel privileged to have worked alongside you through this daunting process, it'll stay with me forever."

"Thanks for everything, you are very professional and skilled at what you do, a credit to the social care system."

"Thank you for treating us with respect and understanding and valuing Traveller culture."

"The support I received from start to finish was amazing; I could not have wished for a better person to support and help me.»"

"I feel more confident to manage behaviours. I have reflected on the things you have helped me see and made positive changes."

"You have given me ideas I had never thought of."

"The support has been fantastic. I have now joined a Kinship support group and am active with groups on social media."

KINSHIP TEAM AROUND THE CHILD TEAM

We have been able to maintain the stability of the kinship placements with 0% of placement breakdowns. More children have also been granted permanence with their kinship foster carers in 2024/2025 compared to the previous year.

We have been able to maintain an excellent team performance data of 92% and above in supervision home visits, annual reviews, unannounced home visits and DBS check records.

We have been able to support our kinship foster carers to significantly improve the records of logs with the highest of 81%, which is the highest record in the history of the team.

We have been able to implement the kinship care practice guide, and kinship care strategy including having regular meetings with other professionals to discuss and review our offer for therapeutic support, training and housing. However, housing remains a big challenge for the team.

We have continued to work with the National Kinship Charity, including inviting the kinship care charity staff to our team meeting and events.

We have continued to devise robust training and support plans with our foster families to ensure that the families are well supported.

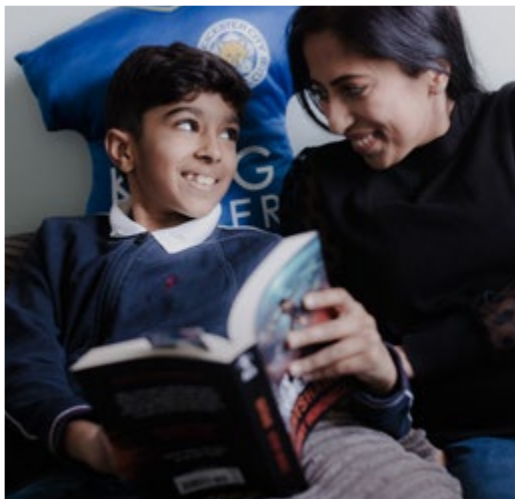
We have continued to support our newly approved kinship foster carers with completion of their TSD standards and the skills to foster course.

We have continued to promote and to support our kinship foster families through the SGO process, and 5 kinship foster families have been granted SGO.

We have continued to have regular POD meetings for the team though these have not always been held monthly.

We have developed 2 new kinship support groups and continued to support 4 kinship support groups.

We have been able to support three student social workers in the team, but unfortunately, we have not been able to return one of these in term as the fostering service is currently not offering the ASYE programme to newly qualified social workers.



Areas for Development for Next Year:

- To work closely with the National Kinship Care Charity to devise robust skills to foster training for our newly approved kinship foster carers.
- To work alongside TAC team to improve our therapeutic offer both to the children in kinship care and to the kinship carers.
- To implement and develop the support plans within Fostering and Form K for all carers.
- To work closely with the National Kinship Care Charity, kinship foster carer support group leaders and other key partners/ stakeholders to coordinate available services, and to develop 3 more kinship carers support groups.
- To continue to use the 'high support, high challenge, and high expectations' approach, and our kinship support tool kit to ensure placement stability, and an increase in permanence and SGO offers.
- To actively organise and offer 3-4 family events specifically to kinship foster families this year.
- To establish a robust mentoring and pudding scheme for the kinship foster carers to ensure that newly approved kinship foster carers and those struggling with the care of the children are well supported.
- To continue to support kinship foster families who are having housing problems/issues and living in overcrowded homes through collaborative working with the housing operational managers and housing associations.
- To maintain an excellent team performance data of 95% and above in supervision home visits, annual reviews, unannounced home visits, medicals, DBS check records, foster carer training, TSD standards and logs.
- To continue to embed the kinship care practice in the team, and to implement the kinship strategy through POD and team meeting discussions.
- To continue to promote and to maintain specialism/ championship within the team to enable staff development and career progression.
- To continue to prioritise and to offer staff well-being through various physical activities and events to enable a healthy and strong team.



THE DEDICATED PLACEMENT SUPPORT TEAM

“A highly skilled support team provides additional help to those carers during times of need. This intervention is underpinned by therapeutic values and has been successful in helping to ensure that children experience stability in a home that is helping to enhance their sense of identity and belonging”.

Ofsted 2024.

Leicestershire's Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST) has been in operation since 2016, its primary aim being to increase placement stability for children in care, which involves working across the spectrum of placements they live in. The team works holistically with everyone in the home, recognising the importance of listening, and giving everyone a voice. Support workers have a low caseload, in order to enable them to increase placement stability through timely, flexible and creative intervention, including working outside normal working hours. DPST intervention includes working directly with children and young people, or indirectly through work with their carers, empowering all to reach their own resolutions and solutions, in order to achieve positive outcomes.

The Work of DPST is Aimed at:

Supporting rehabilitation home for young people, for whom that is their care plan, and supporting everyone to manage the transition effectively.

Supporting transitions, including supporting young people to move from residential to family-based care, and providing the scaffolding that enables positive outcomes.

Working with carers to increase their understanding and implementation of therapeutic parenting, working within a framework of trauma informed practice, PACE/DDP, and learning through play/Theraplay.

Supporting carers with empathetic listening, in order to increase their sense of wellbeing and resilience, and for them to feel safe and held in what is sometimes a challenging role.

Running a range of activities and events for carers and the children in their care, aimed at increasing connections and building bonds, as well as having fun!

Attending all meetings held in regard to the young person they are working with, contributing to any relevant assessments, and providing reports for carers' annual reviews/panel.

Being available outside normal working hours, to ensure carers can access support when other services may not be available.

2024/2025 Placement Support

Between 01.04.2024 and 31.03.2025 DPST worked with 51 children, living in 53 placements, whose cases were closed by the start of this year. Another 13 cases that were open during that period remain open.

The team worked with 5 of those young people during more than one period of intervention, with the focus being different for re-referrals.

The breakdown of 53 placements by type was:

The trajectory planning for 1 young person and their parent was supported by DPST, with rehabilitation home achieved, the team were also involved in supporting 3 children following their return home.

1 young person was supported with being prepared to step down from residential to a fostering placement, unfortunately that placement has now broken down, but the support will continue.

2024/2025 Development and Activity

Towards the end of the last financial year, DPST began to focus on an additional piece of work, aimed at supporting the cohort of children in residential who are 13 and under. The aim is to identify any barriers to a transition to a family-based placement being successful. The initial intervention will be with staff and the child/young person, with DPST continuing to support the new carers, once they have been identified.

Therapeutic Life Story work, to further support those children where that is identified as a need. Half the team are attending 6 days' training in July 2025, with the remainder attending in November 2025.

Having run a wellbeing group for teenagers in care since 2023, DPST are in the process of revising that offer, and workshops for carers.

The SSW and TM are responsible for managing the specialist foster care schemes:

- The cohort of specialist carers currently consists of 7 households with the capacity to offer 10 placements, matching permitting.
- 1 household resigned in April 2025, although they have become Staying Put carers for the young person in that placement.
- 1 household was recruited this year, and a young person was placed with them promptly.
- There are currently 8 young people placed with a specialist carer as their main placement.
- 1 carer is offering respite, until they are in a position to offer the department a full-time placement.
- Regular focused Learning Together bespoke events for specialist carers are being held, some with the support of a clinical psychologist, who can offer advice on a consultancy basis.
- Regular coffee mornings are being held between the team and carers, as an informal source of support, including peer support.

Plans for 25/26

We know that our Dedicated Support Team is unique to Leicestershire and provides invaluable support to families both internal and external foster placements, this will continue with evaluation forms to measure the impact the team has. We also want to strengthen the offer through working to provide life story work to children stepping down from residential care.

Continue to offer retention events to both families and groups

Targeted groups for teenagers

Implement DDP with our families in need of this support

SUPPORTED LODGINGS SCHEME

Leicestershire has been running a supported lodgings scheme for a number of years and was registered by Ofsted in December 2023 under the Supported Accommodation Regulations 2023.

We have 30 Supported Lodgings Hosts who together offer 39 placements for young people aged 16 to 21. The team is responsible for recruiting, assessing, and supporting these hosts to help young people achieve their best during their placements.



With the implementation of the new regulations, we have introduced a number of new systems to support and promote outcomes for the young people and support our hosts:

- An online Supported Lodgings Handbook
- Young Peoples Guide
- Annual Review of Hosts including feedback from hosts, the service, stakeholders and young people
- Access to and expectation of training for hosts
- Locality Support Groups including wellbeing walks

This year we recruited 5 new hosts to the scheme. Many young people remain with the hosts post 21yrs on a private arrangement, which although this means we lose a host it is a positive outcome for the young person.

The team also support our young people in Staying Put Arrangements. Currently we have 51 young people staying put. They undertake 6 monthly monitoring visits and work closely with the young person's PA to ensure it remains appropriate.

Plans for 2025/26

Implement Regulation 32 monitoring – a six-month overview of the scheme

Increase recruitment campaigns with targeted recruitment in specific Leicestershire localities

Have a recruitment target of 5 host families

Increase of voice work by developing age appropriate / more creative ways of gaining feedback from our young people.

Undertake voice audits.

FOSTERING PANEL CHAIR REPORT

This report refers to the functioning of Leicestershire County Council Fostering panel for the year 2024/25. The Fostering panel is constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 2011.

Independent Panel Chair's Comments:

This last year has been a time of consolidation for the panel and the development of our working relationships with the service and with each other.

We have a new vice Chair, Thure Johansen, and we are very pleased to have him in this new role after his regular attendance as an individual panel member.

The most significant change over the last 12 months has been the introduction of the 5-year standard for foster carers to attend panel. This is something that we believe is an excellent way of understanding foster carers' journey, ensuring standards are met and that the Local Authority is supporting them in their challenging role.

We understand it's daunting to come back to panel if you haven't been to one for many years, however we hope that carers will find it a useful and supportive experience to validate their role or to support them in meeting the required fostering standards.

We look forward to seeing more of you over the coming year.

Sue Tribe

Panel has played a crucial role in the scrutiny of cases being presented. There have been a number of complex cases that have come to panel during the last year that we have had to carefully consider. The experience of panel members, from a range of professional disciplines and personal background, has meant our recommendations focus on the best interest of the child, and in regard to the national minimum standards. It's been a pleasure to chair the panel over the last year.

Mohamed Patel

Summary:

- The agency has a Central List of 25 panel members, in accordance with Fostering Regulations, Guidance 2011.
- We have two Panel Chairs, three Vice Chairs (one newly recruited) and seven social work representatives, two of whom are independent and five are employed by Leics Children and Families Service.
- 36 panels were scheduled (3 panels a month) with 28 panels being held.
- All panels are held face to face.
- Quarterly Business meetings are held with the Service (SM/ASM/TM's) and the Chairs/Vice Chairs providing the opportunity to raise concerns, practice themes etc.
- Chairs/Vice Chairs meetings take place on a quarterly basis, which has supported development and a consistent approach
- The number of kinship foster carers seeking approval has continued to fall, this is primarily due to the focus on securing permanency via SGO's and to a lesser extent Care Arrangement Orders (CAO), as part of care proceedings.
- Part of Panel's role is quality assurance. The quality of reports presented is overall felt to be of a good standard: 63% considered 'Good', 19 % 'Excellent' and another 19% 'Adequate'.
- The feedback received by attendees at Panel is consistently high.

Work overseen by Panel:

- 12 mainstream carers approved
- 1 Specialist Approval
- 16 kinship carers approved
- 4 negative kinship assessments
- 19 First review
- 5 Review following concerns (this includes one review which panel did not recommend continued approval which was overturned by ADM)
- 4 reviews for a change in approval
- 2 reviews following a change in circumstances.
- 5 deferrals
- 26 Closures
- 2 Closures with Concerns
- 5 Reg 25



Panel Development

There have been occasions when it has been identified that applicants have specific learning needs and/or neurodiversity, as a means of adjustment questions have been provided a short time before entering panel. This approach has proved both popular and beneficial and has now been rolled out to all attendees. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Returning carers to panel on a 5 yearly basis has been agreed and began in 2025. This supports good practice by providing independent oversight. This will gradually be phased in to avoid the need to hold additional panels, and we estimate to have all foster carers returned to panel for a review by 2030.

Feedback from attendees to panel continues to be collected and monitored.

Interim reports are now submitted to panel. These inform panel of significant delays in reviews, a change in circumstances (for example foster carers have separated) or when allegations are being investigated. This allows Panel and ADM to have oversight and identify areas of work to be completed for the forthcoming review.

The Panel Advisor and Panel Chair now meet the week before panel to discuss forthcoming cases and to address any concerns.

Timescales for reading panel papers has been strengthened in order for issues or concerns to be raised with the Panel Advisor and Chair. Thus, reducing the likelihood of deferrals.

Applicants/carers now have access to panel member's biographies when attending Panel

Panel members' training day was held in March. The Practice Excellence team facilitated a reflective case discussion on a kinship case. A session was also held to give members an insight into Reflective Carer Training that our carers attend.

The Panel Advisor is a member of the East Midlands Panel Advisers' Forum, which provides the opportunity to share good practice and highlight areas of development.

We have continued to develop diversity within our Panels to reflect the community we live in. We now have 3 members who have personal experience of kinship/SGO arrangements. But work continues to involve a young care experienced individual.

The way we collect and collate feedback has changed which has made it easier to monitor quality of reports and now includes monitoring of ADM recommendations.

Objectives for 25/26

To recruit a young care experienced person to panel.

To ensure panel members complete mandatory training on: GDPR, Equality & Diversity and Safeguarding.

To update job descriptions and contracts for panel members/chairs/vice chairs to reflect the changes in practice.

Work to ensure consistency across panels is ongoing.

To further improve the quality assurance role of panel.

To monitor and address the delays in gaining medicals for assessments and reviews.

AGENCY DECISION MAKER OVERVIEW

This year has seen the fostering service continue with stable leadership across assessment and TAC teams, and there has been greater consistency for children and families across SSW allocation and support. They are a service who know themselves and their carers well. There is a clear focus on carers wellbeing and retention though building meaningful relationships and purposeful practice.

There is a spread of experienced social workers and early career social works alongside support staff and established leaders. Partnership working across other services is increasingly integrated into practice.

The number of fostering families has been maintained at 126 households, with new families becoming approved equaling those leaving and this places us below the targets for growth and sufficiency. I have noticed increasing numbers of mainstream families being approved for respite only and carers resigning soon into their fostering career and in reality, this points to a reduction in overall fostering placements available and will reduce sufficiency, which is not ideal in an increasingly pressurised and demanding climate.

Due to national demands around placement sufficiency and lack of adopters, there are delays in care planning and achieving timely transitions to permanence for children in short term arrangements meaning that these arrangements are frequently extending beyond 2 years (short term) and this is contributing to further pressures on placement sufficiency.

Kinship numbers are decreasing overall, and that is in large part a result of the development work in Kinship Assessment around IVA's and all options assessments which underpinned by the greater practice and financial support via SG develop work and overarching Kinship Strategy.

The service benefits from knowledgeable and confident social workers and managers who have a good understanding of the role and responsibilities of a supervising social worker and fostering regulations. New Snr Practitioners are also making significant contributions to learning and development around evidenced based practice and professional curiosity which will build skill over the coming months.

I look forwards to the new mosaic build, making the review process smoother and information more accessible and transparent.

Strengths

- There has been significant development in the kinship assessment team and the impact of the developmental work across Initial viability assessments, PLO tracking and quality of assessment/ support planning means timely and robust outcomes for these families.
- Working relationships with CIC and Permanence teams are stronger and I see regular evidence of working in partnership, specifically around care planning and risk management.
- Assessing social workers in both Kinship and Mainstream are knowledgeable and effective social workers.
- Overall, there is a good level of stability in the SSW support to families, and fewer changes in social workers over this year.
- Carers offer consistent positive feedback about their experience of the service and feeling supported by their SSW, TM, ASM and SM.
- Developmental work completed by ASM on assessing support carers and changes in circumstances for carers both offer a greater rigor informing the reviews and increasing evidenced based SSW analysis underpinning practice.
- Fostering households are now being presented back to fostering panel every 5 years for independent oversight and there is also an increase in using updates to panel and [presenting complex assessments

to panel for independent oversight, all of which signals a service that are committed to ensuring rigor and quality assurance underpin decision making.

- There is increasing evidence across Kinship services of the impact of the Kinship Support Strategy, leading to more children leaving our care via an SGO both at the end of care proceedings and following a period of support via Kinship TAC where the rigor and oversight of the SGO panel is evident in respect of support planning and pace.
- Increase in successful ratification of permanence for long term caring arrangements via permanence panel.
- DPST remains a valuable resource across both Mainstream and TAC for skills development and stability support for carers and Carers feedback is positive about the benefit and impact of this service.

Areas for development

- ADM recommendations being actioned consistently, and evidence of progression of actions across the review year – ADM audit, ADM feedback and fostering panel advice has identified this as an area in need of improvement but there is a need for more to be done to evidence change in practice.
- Grip and oversight over the medical review cycle is regularly a barrier in annual fostering reviews, apparently rooted in a lack timely submission of medical review papers from service as well as medical Advice being not being meaningful or timely.
- There are too frequent occasions where reviews are 'lost' in the process between FIRO and ADM, and therefore result in delays in ADM decisions being achieved and lack of effective means of tracking the review process to conclusion, this is despite the best efforts of the FIROs and I am hopeful that the new mosaic build will do some way to addressing this.
- Childrens voice being sought and critically the impact/influence that their voices have on our assessment, planning and support needs to be stronger across both Kinship and Mainstream, including bottom lines around children being seen in placement, even if they have respite only arrangements in place.
- I would like to see greater evidence of training hours being tracked across the review year and greater evidence of the impact of this training on fostering practice. – TSP's risk being vague and generic and it would be a good piece of work for the Senior Practitioners to look at practice improvement in this specific area.
- Recent audit activity about the experience of transfer from Kinship assessment to Kinship TAC offers food for thought around how we smooth this process
- The use of network meetings across TAC services could be an area where there is much to gain.
- Implementation of the Afdit model would be useful in building skill and strengthening analysis around cultural competency and supporting transracial placements.
- Application of ex-partner reference policy in assessment would benefit from a relaunch.



INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

The Figures

87	current Independent Visitors
24	independent Visitors approved from April 24 to March 25
10	Independent Visitors ended in the role during this period. 8 due to personal circumstances and 2 due to inconsistency in visiting patterns. Of those that have left the scheme 3 are maintaining contact with their young person informally outside of the scheme, which is a real positive for the young people.

Achievements

- Recruited more male IVs – target 5 recruited 8.
- Extended support to IVs through online group supervision
- Monthly Support groups set up at various locations across Leicestershire - run by IVs for IVs
- The first National Independent Visitor Day was held on the 15th of Jan 2025. This is to be an annual event -LCC coordinator part of the national working party.
- Chairmans celebration event held in March - 10 IVs invited under the category of amazing stories.
- We successfully link IVs into foster carers events as part of the fostering community.
- Recruitment stands through IV contacts – (2 Haymarket events and a work based event at an IT company in Derby) and in conjunction with the Fostering Recruitment Team - Leicester Pride, Cosby Yarn Bomb, Scarecrow Festivals in Heather and Lubenham and Market Harborough Carnival Day to name a few.
- Successful annual joint activity with IVs and young people – this year supported by the Space Centre
- Good news stories from IVs for media campaigns – longest serving (11 years), youngest (20 when started), male IV, 1st year as an IV, couple undertaking the role together. This has generated additional enquiries.
- 1 of our IVs has gone on to become an approved foster carer for LCC and 3 ex foster carers and 2 members of LCC staff through internal promotion have become IVs in this period.
- Face to face group supervision events 3 times a year.
- Continue to produce information sheets for IVs to support them in their role.
- Coordinate and chair quarterly regional meetings for IV coordinators
- Attending quarterly national IV coordinator meetings - aim of both meetings is to share best practice from across the country to inform practice in Leicestershire.
- Member of the LCC volunteer management network
- Communication Plan in place and 6 weekly scheduled meetings held with our communication team responsible for fostering Leicestershire communities to promote the scheme.

Areas for Development

- Develop a video for young people explaining the IV role.
- Develop more robust processes for young people staying on the scheme beyond 18.
- Continue to find ways to support young people in OOC placements.
- Produce more good news stories for Leicestershire chatters, social media to raise profile of the IV Scheme
- Some pictures of our IVs and events attended
- Some of our male IVs at a Group Supervision evening
- Chairman event in March 25
- Picnic in the park to celebrate national volunteer week – June 24

Feedback From Young People

“Boxing has changed my life, and I am a different person now. I am more confident, more mature, and I am able to project a better voice now. My IV helped me make this change and he encouraged me, and he believed in me. This would not have happened without the support and encouragement of my IV.”

“My IV visits regularly and is one of the best people that I have ever met. I didn't have any trust in anyone before, but I learnt to trust my IV.”

“I love it' I am doing lots of different and new activities and having fun. I like my IV and get on well. They are very easy to talk to.”

“My IV has cheered me up and he changed me because a year ago I was lazy.”

Feedback from IVs

“I have to say Em has inspired me to go for the Supported Lodgings role, Seeing the young lady she is turning into has been a joy, which I hope to still do for many more years to come (until she gets fed up of me)! I don't think she realises the positive effect she has on me.”

“He is a joy to be with. He always wants us to play, getting us to climb trees and play hide and seek in country parks. He has made us feel young again, even though we might ache the next day! He recently asked us if we would be still in his life when he has grown up – we assured him that we would be! We can honestly say that we feel joyful after each visit and are really fortunate to have met him. We are sure that there are so many benefits for our young person, but, equally, there are so many for us.”

“I have found it incredibly rewarding and would wholeheartedly recommend the Independent Visitor role to others.”

“Having taken on the role in late 2023, I haven't looked back...I have found the role to be rewarding in many ways and if I only make one small positive difference to the YP I am paired with then the whole experience has been worthwhile”.

“Over the last 11 years I've been matched with two young people, each for many years, from teens into early adulthood. I love that I can build a meaningful, friendly relationship with a young person. I've learnt a lot about things I didn't know a thing about beforehand, I've been played music I might not personally choose and had my nails painted and decorated in ways I didn't know the terms for 11 years ago, but mostly I've learnt a fair bit about what it's like to be a young person in care from two brave and smart young people I feel privileged to have met and spent quality time with”.



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 4
NOVEMBER 2025**

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL 2024 – 2025

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the work and data of the Virtual School (VS) for the academic year 2024-2025. This report is a statutory requirement and will be published onto the County Council's website.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Local Authority (LA) to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by them, wherever they live or are educated through the Virtual School Head (VSH). The Children and Social Work Act 2017 added the duty to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children. These duties are set out in the February 2018 statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children'.
3. This report highlights the work of the Virtual School for Academic year 2024 – 2025. A copy of the full annual report is appended to this report.

Background

4. In Leicestershire, a team of highly skilled professionals work passionately to support the role of the VS, its duties and advocate for young people. The Service brings together information about children and young people in care to Leicestershire and use this information to support schools, carers, and young people to achieve their best in their education.
5. The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship. This has now been extended to include those in Kinship care.
6. The Virtual School has a non-statutory strategic leadership role for children who have or have had a social worker (in the last 6 years). This commenced from 1 September 2021. This role is being considered under the Childrens Wellbeing bill to become statutory.

Service Priorities

7. Last academic year's priorities were:
 - i. To raise the aspirations of and for looked-after children (LAC) and previously looked-after children (PLAC);
 - ii. To narrow progress and attainment gaps;
 - iii. To improve stakeholders' understanding of the educational needs of children in care and those adopted from care and strengthen their support of education;
 - iv. To ensure the views of children and young people are heard, recorded, and inform decisions regarding their education; and,
 - v. To maintain a resilient, vibrant, informed, and knowledgeable team.

What's working well

Data Presentation

8. The visual dashboards help to support with analysis and scrutiny so that the VS can use this data to drive its work and target support. The data in the report shows the school aged cohort who the Local Authority has a statutory duty to report on, but also in the appendices is a wider analysis of all children and young people from Early years through to post 16. This now includes more detailed data for children with a social worker which will enable the VS to focus on school attendance and suspensions and target schools for more focused work.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

9. The VS continues to hold a high standard of PEPs and their completion, with a 98% completion rate for PEPs held over the last academic year. This is due to a passionate, dedicated and knowledgeable team who advocate for children rigorously to ensure their education is at the forefront of discussions and decisions.

Pupil Premium Plus (PPP)

10. PPP (Pupil Premium Plus) allocations have been highlighted and the impact it has had for young people. This has helped the VS work with schools around SMART targets in PEPs and how best to allocate funding to ensure significant impact is being made. Analysis shows that 82.7% of targets linked to PPP spend during 2024-25 were successfully achieved, compared to 79.1% the previous year. Work has started to support schools further on writing SMART targets in order to increase this further.

Attainment

11. It is important to note that the attainment data contained in this report is provisional data and not officially confirmed until April 2026. This will update this data once published and added to this report.

12. There remains a significant gap in attainment for the VS young people, with their being an increase in suspensions and exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour, children out of education and awaiting SEND assessments, all of which impacts on outcomes.
13. The VS is therefore working more closely with schools around their trauma informed practice and the training offer, tripling the uptake compared to the previous year. The provisional data shows an increase in Early years, KS1 and KS2 data. There has been a reduction in those young people achieving 1-4 at GCSE; this is cohort specific and largely due to the significant needs of the Year 11's and increased suspensions and Alternative Provision use for Social Emotional Mental Health needs this year.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

14. The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children cohort continues to increase, and the VS is adjusting its work to ensure it can respond to the increase in demand. The Council has a statutory duty to provide the same level of support to unaccompanied young people as to any other child in care to enable them to fulfil their educational outcomes. This, however, is proving a challenge as college places are filling rapidly, and provision is limited. The future aim is to support this cohort further by looking at other educational options the VS can partner with, including working with the new Post-16 Service manager to develop new opportunities. At the end of academic year 2022-23, there were 34 UASC students at statutory school age compared to 14 the previous year and 155 post-16 compared to 50 the previous year, making a total of 189 compared to 64 the previous year. This is a significant increase in the UASC cohort, and this year this has increased further to 285 in total.

Achievements and Participation

15. The VS has supported children and young people to have access to a wider curriculum offer this academic year. This has grown and the VS has worked hard to gain a Platinum Artsmark award to ensure the Arts and wider curriculum is developed and as important for the children and young people as other areas of their education.
16. Childrens Voice work has been part of the focus this year to ensure more of the children and young people can share their views about education and the support of the VS. Snippets of voice from different aspects throughout the year have been included in the report, including participation events, impact report and book clubs.
17. Plans for this academic year include advocating and striving for raising aspirations and attainment for the children and young people, as well as partnering with those that can support and offer experiences. This also includes a recent partnership with Leicester Grammar school and the national springboard foundation to look at ways to get more of the young people into independent schools with fully funded bursaries.
18. The VS has also been involved in a number of pilots/projects around the arts looking at how music can support belonging, including how taiko drumming can support with belonging through Year 6 transition.

Key Challenges

19. A rise in the number of UASC has meant that colleges are getting full earlier than in previous years. A new Post-16 Service manager is in post and will aim to develop additional further education opportunities.
20. There has been a continued use of suspension across schools, in secondary in particular, although data from the summer term shows a decrease compared to previous years.

Future Plans and Developments

21. Involvement in the SEN investment fund in order to train more senior leaders in trauma informed practice and policy
22. A pilot in supporting schools to set up nurture provisions. This is a project to support schools to develop and maintain Nurture Groups across Leicestershire. Training and support will be offered to interested Primary Schools by the VS
23. The Service is continuing to embed the Arts into the VS offer by extending the Artsmark journey and has reapplied to work towards the award again when the current Platinum Award runs out. In addition, the Service will be continuing to support the Care to Dance Programme, offer Theatre experiences, develop a Taiko drumming and work on a pilot project with Coram Shakespeare as well as signposting and raising the Arts profile.

Background papers

24. None

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

25. None

Equality Implications

26. The work of the Virtual School actively seeks to reduce inequalities.

Human Rights Implications

27. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Appendices

28. Virtual School Annual Report 2024-25.

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Virtual School Annual Report for August 2024 -August 2025



Annual quote from our young people

'SYPAC gets me out of the house and I get the third party support I need for college. Most of the staff that come to SYPAC are brilliant, most leave after so many years but the Virtual School worker has stayed the longest and helped when I needed it with college and other times.' Young person who attends SYPAC.

Annual Statement from Director of Children's Services

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Virtual school that outlines the work over the past 12 months to support some of our most vulnerable children and young people to achieve and succeed in their educational attainment and experience. This report details a full year of progress against the additional responsibility of the VS to support education provisions to support all children who have a social worker to have access to good educational experiences and settings, where they can be nurtured and encouraged to achieve. I am extremely proud of the service and all it does to support and encourage our children and young people to have positive educational experiences that enable them to develop and grow.

Jane Moore

Annual statement from the Virtual School Head

To have contributed to the Outstanding Ofsted Judgement in 2024, achieve the Platinum Artsmark award and go on to win Outstanding team of the year award in Autumn 2024, highlight the journey Leicestershire Virtual School have been on to provide the very best for our young people. We have a dedicated and passionate team of incredible staff, who go above and beyond to advocate for better outcomes for children in care, and I couldn't be prouder of the team we have here in Leicestershire. This year has been very busy, with even more on offer for our young people. Our method of embedding Arts and Culture and sport into our offer has grown significantly and plays a huge part in opportunities and the support for healing for our young people. Momentum is building in Leicestershire with our amazing schools engaging on our journey of Belonging and becoming trauma informed but also implementing that knowledge into practice. To our wonderful young people, keep doing what you are doing, and never be afraid to dream big!

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to outline the work of the Virtual School in Leicestershire for the academic year August 2024 – August 2025 and analyse the data for the academic year. It will also look at the key priorities for the following academic year 2025-2026. National benchmark data for 2023-24 was published in April 2025 and is considered in this report, however academic year 2024-2025 data will be added after publishing in April 2026. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Local Authority (LA) to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by them, wherever they live or are educated through the Virtual School Head (VSH). The Children and Social Work Act 2017 added the duty to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children. These duties are set out in the February 2018 statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children'.

In Leicestershire we have a team of outstanding professionals who work passionately to support this role, its duties and advocate for our young people. We bring together information about children and young people in care to Leicestershire and use this information to support schools, carers and young people to achieve their best in their education. We are committed to putting our young people first and supporting them to achieve in all aspects of their education and life. This year we were recognised for our work by being awarded Outstanding team of the year 2024/25 at the Pride in Practice awards.

The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship, Kinship care and the Virtual School has a non-statutory strategic leadership role for children who have or have had a social worker (in the last 6 years). This commenced from 1st September 2021. This role is being considered in the Children's Wellbeing Bill as becoming a statutory duty.



Our Guiding Principles

To be Trauma-Informed

T

Trained staff and training offer for all stakeholders.

R

Respectful and non-judgemental interactions with colleagues, young people and carers.

A

Awareness and openness to others' values, opinions and

U

Understanding the need for self-care and colleague support and supervision.

M

Mindful, supportive and empathic approach to challenges.

A

Acceptance, advice, and advocacy.

Our Vision

We are here to work with you, your school, carers and social workers so you can reach your potential, be ambitious and aim high!



Forest School



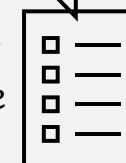
University Days



Careers Days



Your voice



Care to Dance



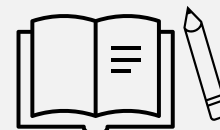
Artsmark



Bookclubs



PEP meetings



Aspirations



Pedestrian Arts and Crafts



Sport

Our Model

All young people have access to education

To support with wider opportunities and targeted support where needed

To create a trauma informed whole school culture across the whole of Leicestershire that embeds relationships and inclusion into policy and practice

Our school

And all the things we do together

Early Years (ages 0-4)

About you

152 of you are on roll at the end of the year.

Listening - Your Voice

We have worked with other services to adapt our training to your settings so they can better support you.

Building Relationships

we continued working with the Dollywood project so you each get a book every month until you are 5

Outcome focused - What you learnt

You started your journey using the early years framework, learning lots of new things. We adapted the PEP so we can add your observations and see what you have been learning.

2045 books have been sent out to you, supporting with your early reading.



School Age (age 5-16)

About you

456 of you are on roll at the end of the year.
Your overall attendance was **83.7%**.

Listening - Your Voice

You want us to consider our language when you are being spoken to in meetings and at school.

Building Relationships - We did

We have trained triple the amount of your schools to ensure they are supporting your needs.

Outcome focused - What you learnt

60% achieved a 'Good Level of Development'.

72.7% of you achieved the expected standard in your phonics screening.

46.7% of you achieved the expected standard for reading in Year 6.

46.7% of you achieved the expected standard for Reading, Writing and maths in Year 6.

22.5% of you achieved a 9-4 grade in English and Maths

Post 16 (age 16 to 18)

About you

507 of you are on roll at the end of the year.
62.1% of you are in education, employment, and training at the end of academic year

Listening - Your Voice

We listen at PEP meetings and follow up any issues raised ie support in changing courses/colleges, chasing up missing bursary payments and generally directing you to where you might get support.

Building Relationships - We did

We have introduced PEPS for those of you who are not in education, employment or training. We introduced a study support programme for some of you.

Outcome focused - What you learnt

Post 16 results – pending

This Academic Year we have

Next year our key priorities to support you are:

Trauma Informed



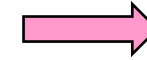
Trained **54** of your schools



Held sessions of training for foster carers and adoptors.



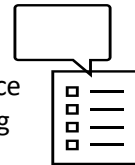
Held sessions of training for social workers



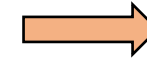
- Support more of your schools to become Trauma informed so that they can support you better

Pupil Voice

86 % of you expressed your voice in your PEP meeting



6 of you chaired your own PEP meeting

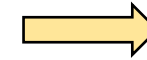


- Continue to listen to your voice and use the language of care toolkit within PEPs

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion



Completed Action research and projects involving looking at culture and identity for different groups.

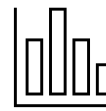


- To develop an offer following on from our research in music and how this can support young people.

Collaboration



Quality assured **95%** of your PEPs to a green or gold standard which means they are the best working documents to support you



Used data to create dashboards so we know who needs help when



- Work closely with all other teams you may work with to ensure you are receiving timely education and the right provision to meet your needs

Participation



partnered with wider curriculum and participation activities to increase your opportunities in a variety of areas.



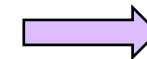
- To continue with our Artsmark to ensure you are offered as many opportunities as possible.

Support to return to education

14 of you attended University this year



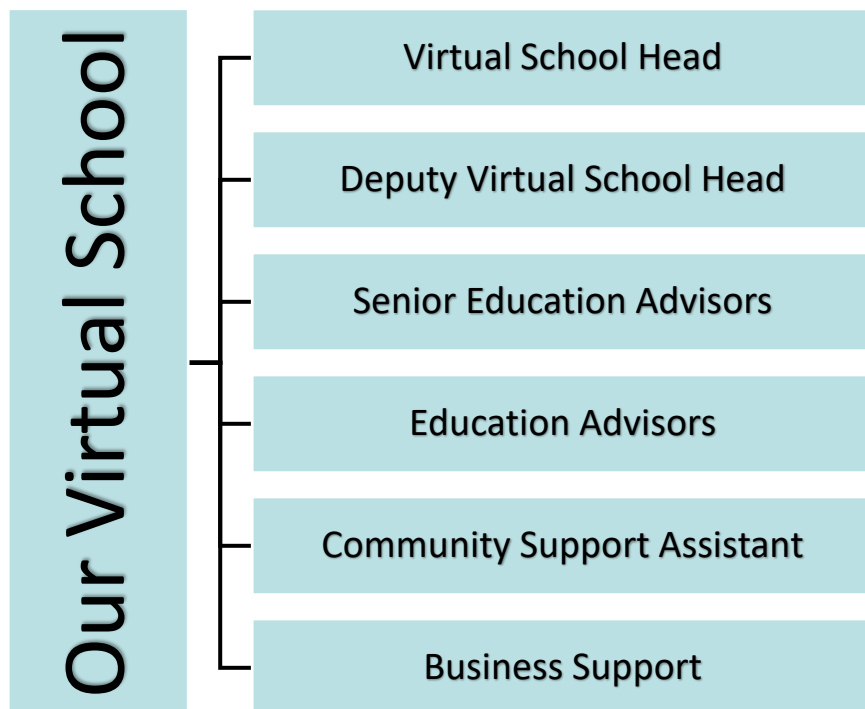
7 of you have attended a NEET PEP to reengage in education



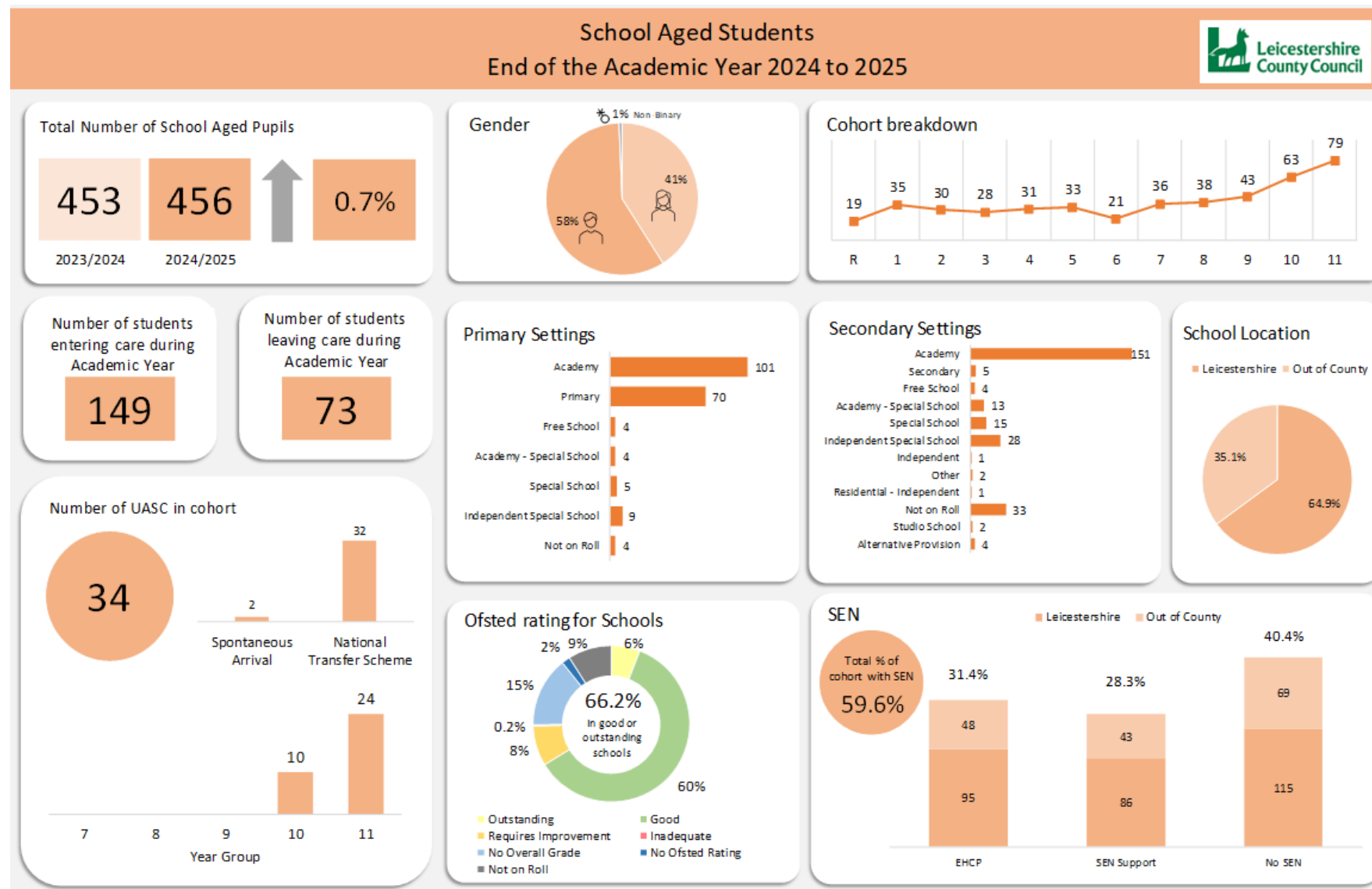
- To develop our offer to support those of you who are Not in Education, Employment or Training through study support programmes/apprenticeships.

Who we are

These are some of the people you may meet in your PEPS or at participation events. This year we won Outstanding team of the year award, in recognition for the support given to our young people, carers, schools and partnerships! We are very proud of this acknowledgment!



Contextual Data for Children in Care



Appendix 1 -
Contextual Data - Aca

Appendix 1: Virtual School Contextual Information 2024-2025



Appendix 2 -
Alternative Education

Appendix 2: Alternative Education 2024-2025

Personal Education Plan (PEP)

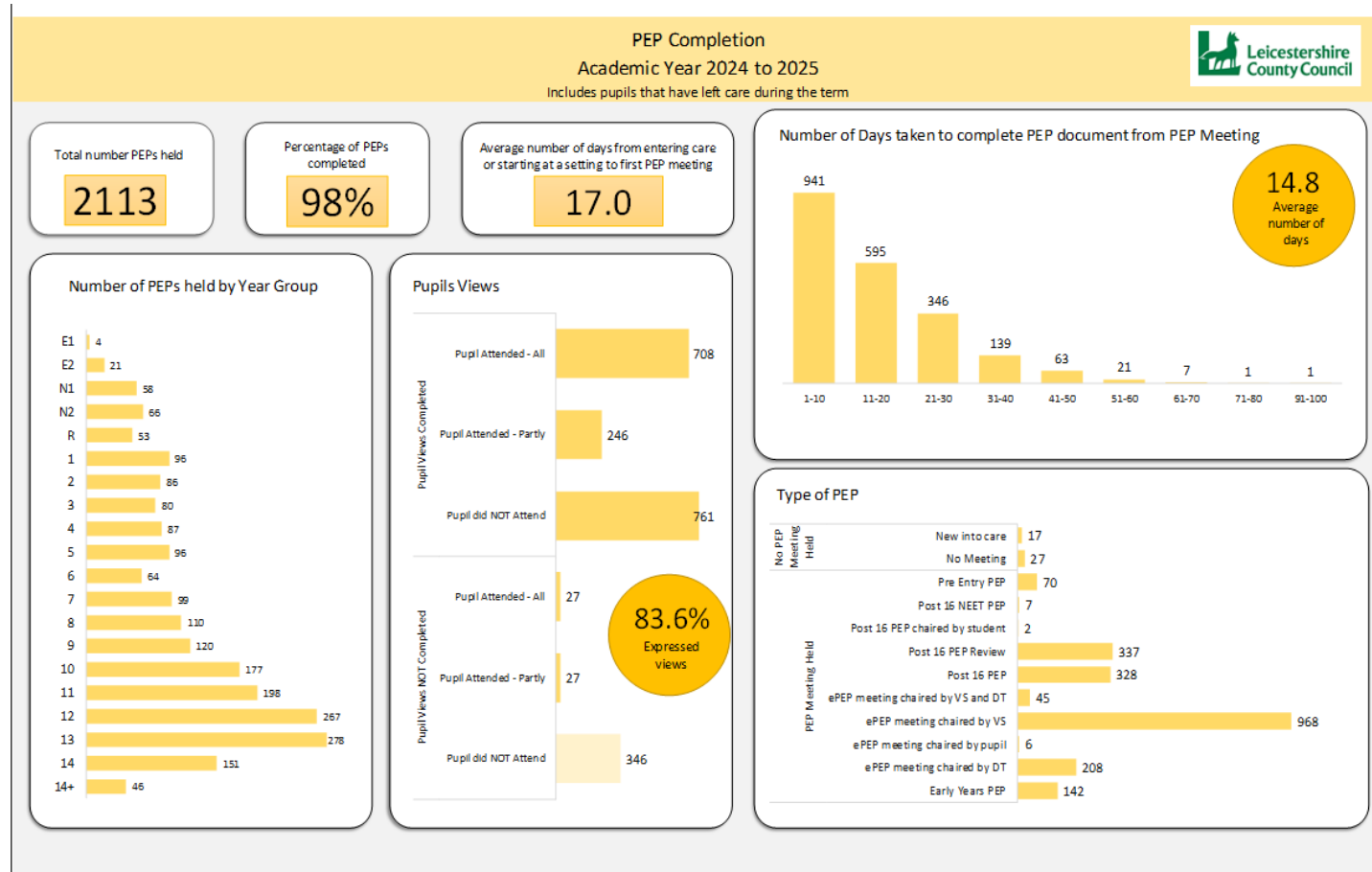
The Virtual school has a duty to ensure the quality of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and arranges PEP meetings for Early Years children attending a nursery or setting, in primary and secondary schools and in post-16 education. Leicestershire PEPs are led by the school, with attendance from the Virtual school, social worker, carer and engagement with the young person.

The Virtual School quality assure every PEP. Each section is rated (red, amber or green) and feedback provided.

NB:

- Year 14 and 14+ PEPS are only held on request of the young person and therefore, not included in overall percentages.
- The young people included in the No Meeting figure, are those young people who have not had the required number of meetings in the academic year.
- New into Care - are those young people who came into care within the last month of the summer term.

As well as the 2113 PEPs that were held, the officers of the Virtual School attended and recorded 270 additional educational meetings compared to 173 last academic year, which are not included in the PEP report.



Appendix 3 - PEP
Completion - Academ

Appendix 3: PEP Completion 2024-2025

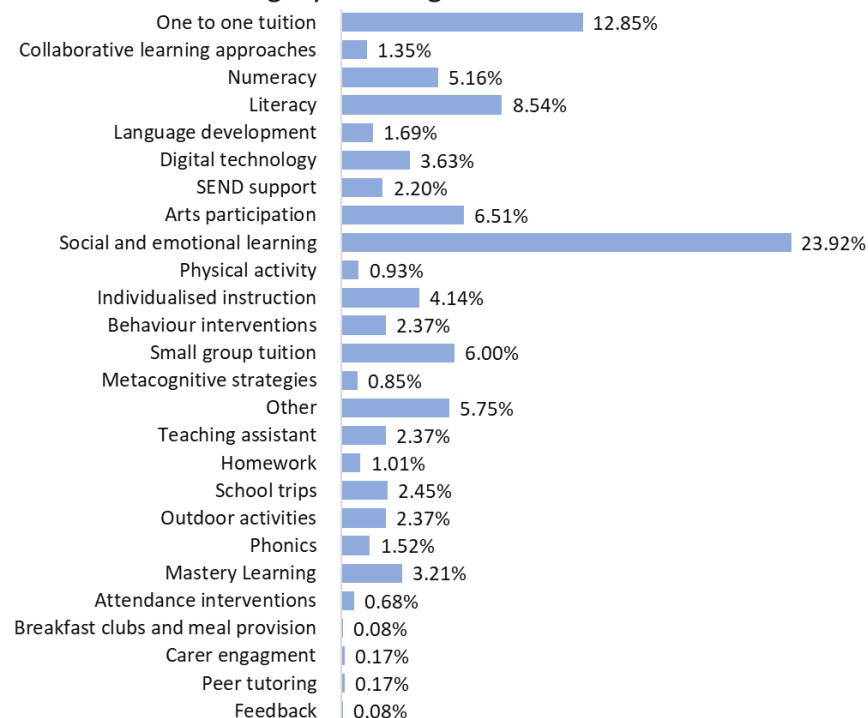
Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) Allocation to Schools (2024-25)

The Virtual School Head manages the Pupil Premium for looked after children and monitors closely its use and impact, ensuring that schools allocate funding to interventions that support the individual needs of the child. Schools are held accountable for the results of children in care and for using the PPP grant appropriately and effectively to support and improve educational outcomes. Schools complete a PPP plan within the SMART Targets section of the PEP which is monitored by the VS, who support and challenge PPP decisions on an ongoing basis via termly progress review meetings and data returns.

The impact of PPP allocated to schools during one term is monitored at the PEP meeting in the following term, i.e., the impact of PPP allocated in the final term (summer) of 2024-25 will be reviewed in the autumn term of 2025 - 26.

Analysis shows that 82.7% of targets linked to PPP spend during 2024-25 were successfully achieved, compared to 79.1 % the previous year. 59.6 % of those targets made significant or moderate impact on the outcomes for our young people in a range of areas. We have been working within our team and with schools to make targets SMARTER to ensure the impact increases moving forward. We have also seen an increase in the type of interventions being put in place around social and emotional learning.

Intervention Category for Targets



Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) – Pooled Resource

The PPP grant was set at £2,570 per eligible pupil and allocated for the Leicestershire VS to manage on behalf of its looked-after children. £470 top-slice is retained by the VSH to support pupils whose educational needs exceeded the per capita grant. When the termly PPP allocation is insufficient to meet a child's needs, additional funding can be applied for from this pooled PPP funding. The VS encourages schools to take on the responsibility for arranging any support required for pupils. This means that pooled funding is allocated to schools for them to commission provision for complex cases. This might typically be for higher-cost ongoing provision such as employing a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) to provide support for effective transitions, academic progress and emotional stability in class, ongoing 1:1 tuition or agreed therapeutic input where needs do not meet CAMHS thresholds. The VS continues to use the pooled resource to commission provision for pupils temporarily not on roll of a school e.g., 1:1 tuition and to fund VS book parcels, participation activities, incentives and rewards and to fund a bespoke service from Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service.



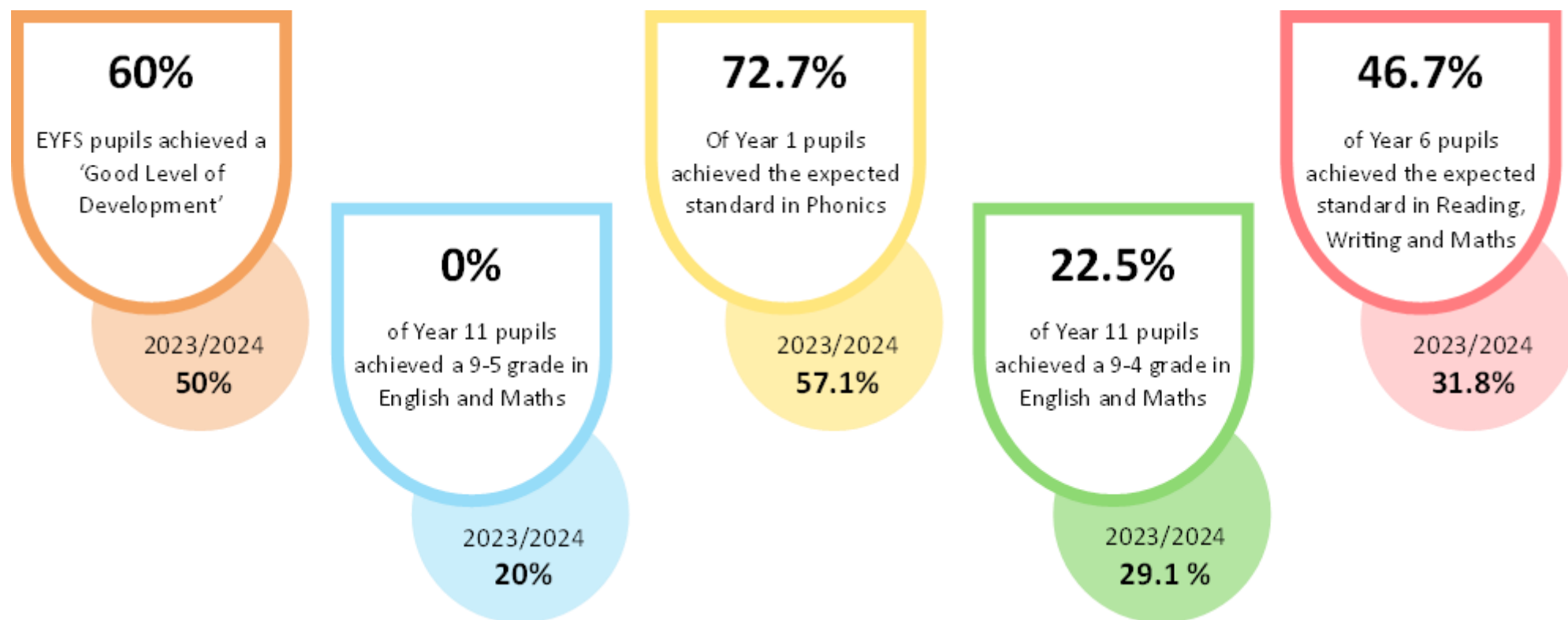
Appendix 4: Use of Pupil Premium - Academic Year 2024-2025

Appendix 4 - Use of
Pupil Premium - Acad

Additional funding in support of Catch-up

The LAC recovery premium and the Schools led tutoring ended last academic year and therefore we no longer have this additional funding stream.

Summary of Children in Care Attainment (provisional data)



All data is provisional and subject to change. Unless stated otherwise, all data is based on pupils who were in care for at least 12 months as at 31st March.

NB; Analysis of data will be provided in the April update once final data is confirmed.



Appendix 5 -
Appendix 5: Provisional Results Academic year 2024-2025

Provisional Results - 2

Previously Looked-After Children

We have continued to have a very busy year with calls from both parents, carers and guardians and from schools and social workers this academic year. We have had 152 referrals made this year, compared to 136 referrals in 2023/2024: 86 parents, 17 Social Workers, 37 teachers including HT, DT, SENCOs and 10 professionals. We received approx. 202 calls totalling 52 hours of calls, 289 emails were received, and 1 meeting attended. Compared to 2023/2024 where our calls received were 252 totalling 32 hours of call, 245 emails were sent and 11 meetings attended. The calls have involved increasingly complex difficulties and required lengthy input from the Virtual school team to raise schools' awareness and understanding of the ongoing issues faced by PLAC children. The amount of time each referral has taken has increased.

The Virtual School offer a duty line which is open every weekday.

- Calls and emails from parents/guardians/DTs or professionals will be logged by our admin team and information will be sent to the Virtual School Senior Education Advisor who is on duty. They will respond within seven working days.
- In the first instance the SEA will offer advice guidance and strategies to the caller which may also include emailing information and signposting to other agencies.
- This may also include supporting with admission and EHCP requests by checking that admissions and SEN are aware of PLAC status to ensure they are being prioritised.
- If there is a particular issue in school the officer may offer to contact school and discuss with them and then feedback to parent/guardian.
- Attachment and Trauma Training will be offered to schools and parents as appropriate.
- In rare instances where the situation in school is very challenging and where there is capacity a Virtual School officer may be able to attend a TEAMS meeting.

We are unable to attend any face-to-face meetings due to capacity.

Kinship Carers

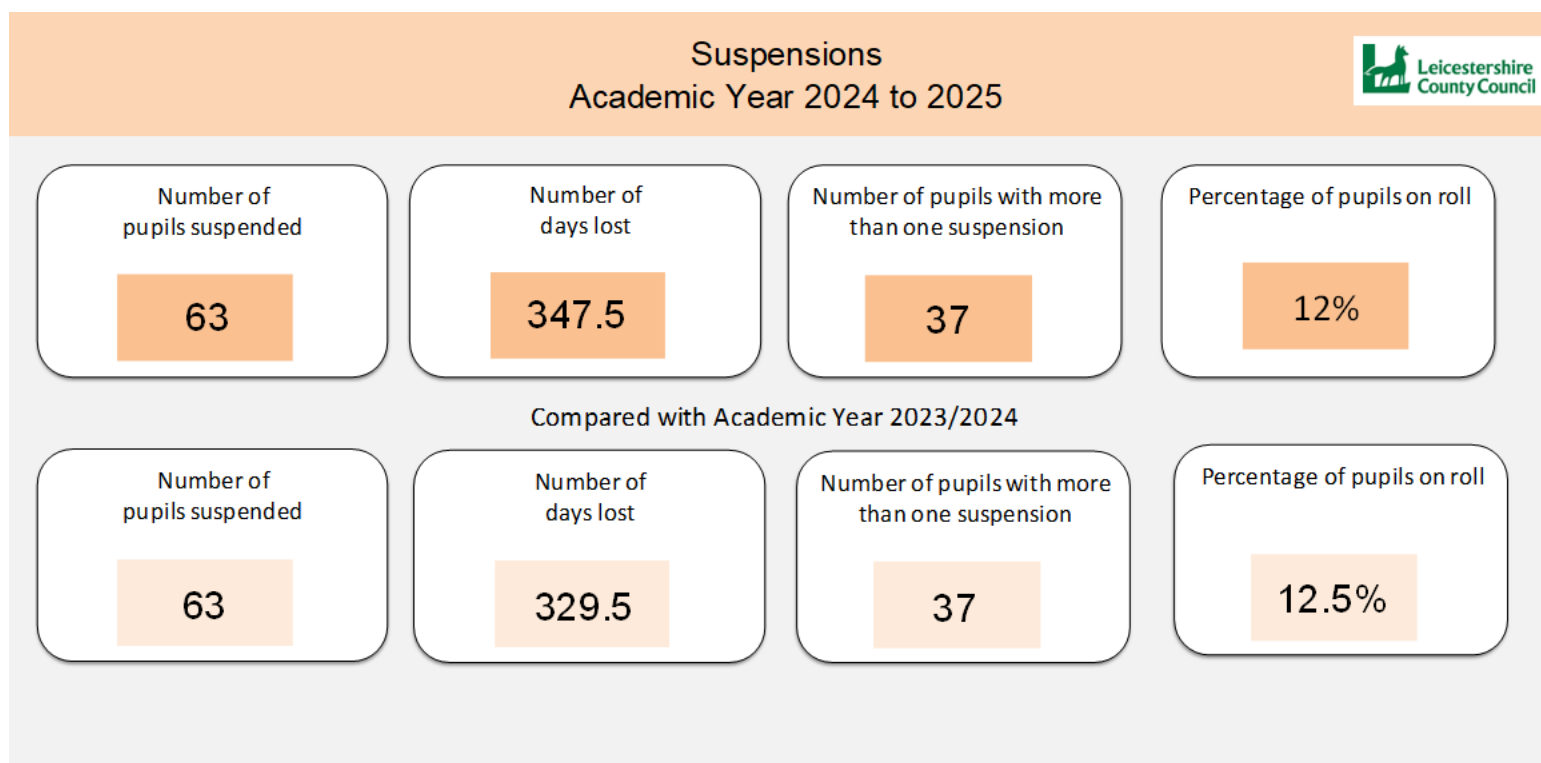
The extension to duties incorporated Kinship carers from December 2023 and therefore the above support and advice is also now offered for those young people and carers in Kinship care.

Our website links to support for PLAC including Kinship carers.

Support offered for;	Total number
Parents /school communication issues	17
School place advice	13
Admissions advice	5
Advice about Behaviour	33
PPP	14
Post 16	1
Signposting other professionals	3
Process and general advice	16
SEN /SEMH advice	29
Help with attendance codes	1
Support for exclusions	4

Attendance and Suspensions

Reporting is prompt and supported using Welfare Call alerts; weekly and ongoing attendance and exclusion reports allied to termly Social, Emotional and Mental Health RAG reports from schools enable the VS to robustly monitor and respond to issues arising.



In 2023 -2024 there were

- 22 young people not on roll at the end of the academic year
 - Of these 6 were Yr 11 UASC, 1 was a Yr 10 UASC, 12 young people with EHCP required specialist placements, 2 young people were placed out of county on entering care so were awaiting school placements, 1 young person who came into care was home educated.

In 2024-2025 there were

- 41 young people not on roll at the end of the academic year
 - Of these 26 were UASC: 19 were Year 11, 7 were Year 10. Also, there were 11 young people with EHCP requiring specialist placements, 3 young people awaiting an EHCP and a specialist placement, 1 young person placed for adoption.

There have been no permanent exclusions of children in care for several years – this is the result of collaborative work across schools/settings and Behaviour Partnerships with the VS. Reporting is prompt and helped using Welfare Call alerts; other weekly and ongoing reports against attendance and exclusions ensure we are robustly monitoring and supporting this agenda with schools and children and young people.

Overall, suspensions have remained at 63 in 2024/25. Suspensions, however, have decreased in the second half of the school year as a result of the work we are doing with the ARC audit and support with schools. Within this figure, there are 54 pupils who received fixed term exclusions (FTE) cross Year 7 to Year 11 at secondary phase. The main reason for suspensions being reported is for persistent or general disruptive behaviour which has increased from the previous year as the main reason, however decreased slightly in the summer term.

The Virtual School works closely with Schools/Settings/Services to develop understanding of issues involved and are working to improve and develop the Trauma informed agenda with schools to ensure consistent practise and support is in place for our young people.



Appendix 6 -
Suspensions - Acaden

[Appendix 6: Suspension dashboard 2024-2025](#)



Appendix 7 -
Attendance - Academi

[Appendix 7: Attendance dashboard 2024-2025](#)

[ARC – The Attachment Research Community](#)

As a result of the data informing us of the increasing number of suspensions, we implemented the ARC framework for all schools to have access to the trauma informed school's toolkit. We launched in January 2024. This tool has allowed us to identify schools who are reflecting on their own practice and asking for further support and training. We aim to continue using this toolkit into next academic year with the aim at getting more of our schools on the platform and begin awarding schools through the Matrix.

School Admissions (2024-25)

The Virtual School strives to ensure that applications for school places other than at normal transition points are processed without delay with as little disruption to the child's education as possible. In 2024-25, there were 83 applications during the academic year for a change of school for Leicestershire LAC. Admissions authorities of all mainstream schools must give the highest priority in their oversubscription criteria to looked-after and previously looked-after children and cannot refuse to admit a looked after child based on challenging behaviour or refer a looked after child for action under the Fair Access Protocol on the basis of challenging behaviour. Looked-after children can be admitted as 'excepted pupils' in relation to the infant class size limit if they are admitted outside the normal admission round and schools cannot refuse admission on the grounds of being full.

As a result of the circumstances of looked-after children, there tends to be a higher rate of in-year school admissions applications submitted for LAC than their peers. This is more usually due to placement moves.

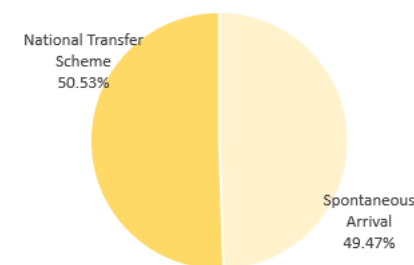
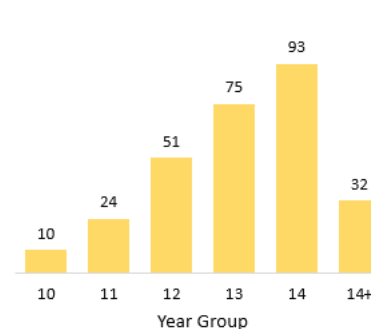
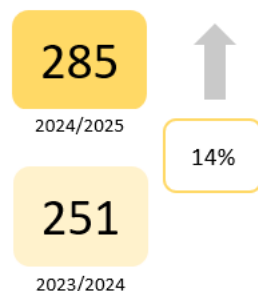
When a child is removed from the roll of one school and is awaiting a new school place, they are reported as a Child Missing Education. Under these circumstances the VS funds 1:1 tuition to maintain a pupil's engagement in education or negotiates the commissioning of 1:1 tuition by SENA services, so that the impact of the delay in accessing formal education is minimised, and to ensure all children have an offer of educational input.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

The Virtual School has the same responsibilities for UASC as it does for any other Leicestershire looked-after child or care leaver, starting with the identification of appropriate education provision and monitoring of progress once enrolled.

At the end of academic year 2024-25 there was 34 UASC students at statutory school age compared to 30 the previous year and 251 post-16 compared to 221 the previous year, making a total of 285 compared to 251 the previous year. This is a further increase in our UASC cohort. This has therefore meant we have had to continue to adapt our response to number of PEPs and increase a casework officers' role to include UASC PEP work. We are continuing to look at the needs of this cohort of young people and working in partnership with others to ensure the best education and provision is provided.

UASC



Support for Early Years

We have continued to support Early Years settings, to have a greater understanding of the attachment and trauma needs of our youngest children. We have run 3 training courses online over the year.

The SEA also offer advice in 6 monthly PEP meetings, with additional support as needed. We have supported schools, Early Years settings and foster carers with the transition to school, with a transition PEP meeting in the summer term and training for foster carers around transition and starting school.

We have liaised with the FEEE team to look at the changes to Early years FEEE and EYPP with a lot of new advice being given to settings, social workers and foster carers. The EYPP is now available to all LAC who receive FEEE from the term after they are 9mths old.

The children continue to receive the books from the Imagination library each month. These are well received by the carers and children.

Educational Psychology Service

We have a long-standing relationship with the Leicestershire Educational Psychology team, where we work collaboratively to prioritise and support our children in care with additional educational needs. This year 26 of our young people were seen by EPs, in order to support their assessments for EHCPs. This work not only involves direct work with our young people, but a collaborative shared practice across both of our teams. Together, the new Guidance for reducing suspensions has been rolled out and shared with schools. This is being used to support schools with strategies and advice on reducing their suspensions.

Inclusion and SENA

We also work closely with the Education Inclusion service and SENA, to ensure our young people in care are prioritised and supported in a timely way.

Post-16 Young People and Care Leavers

Priority is given to ensure all young people at the end of KS4 (age 16) have an identified destination and remain in Employment, Education or Training (EET) during subsequent years. College Designated Persons (DP) for looked after children are invited to the summer PEP meeting of Year 11 pupils whose college destination is known to ensure that plans are in place for a smooth transition into college.

Post 16 Senior Education Advisors conducted 714 PEPS this academic year, compared to 613 PEPs last academic year and were much busier supporting a larger KS5 cohort who had more concerns around education as a result of the uncertainty around courses. The close links with all local colleges, forged over preceding years helped to ease the passage of young people into college, and to access appropriate support.

Number of Post 16 Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) over the past two years: 37.9 % in 2024-2025 compared to 34.8% in 2023-2024. We will always discuss with the social worker to make a referral where we feel a young person may be NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. The Post 16 grant has allowed us to expand our offer to focus on our NEET young people and apprenticeship drive from January 2024. This has included offering more advice and support and PEPS to our NEET cohort however the huge increase in our post 16 UASC cohort, with limited college places has meant the figure in NEET has increased.

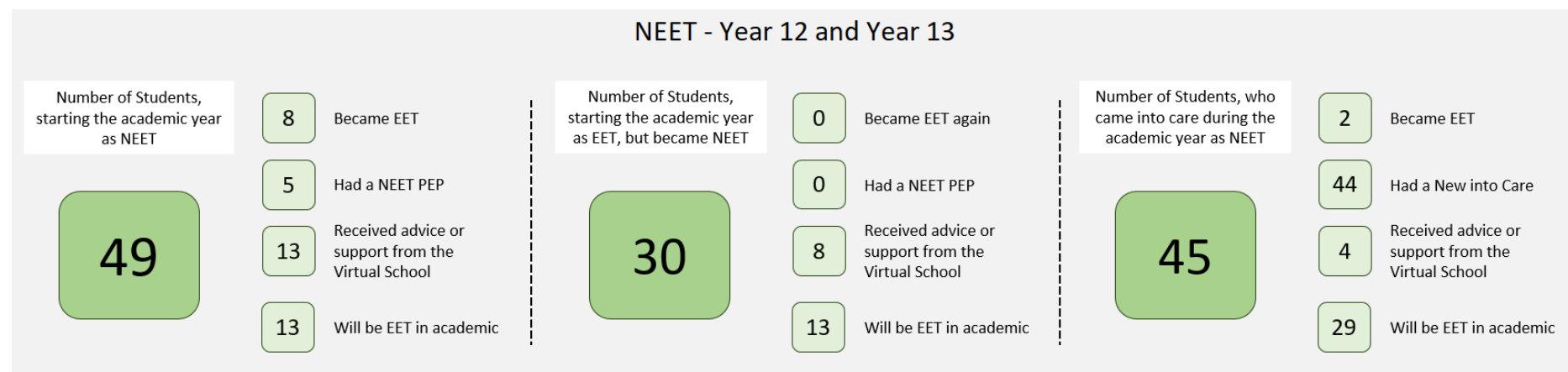
19+ NEET Study Programme

The 19+ Study Support Programme was offered to 19+ NEET YPs. The programme was a 10 week programme offering a day a week of English, maths, Digital Skills and Employability Skills and a day a week of work experience. Towards the end of the programme there were some IAG sessions and a celebration



study support
programme_.pdf

event. Please see attached write up of the programme and the impact it had.



Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

Joint Designated Teacher and Designated Safeguarding lead conference



To launch our new duties and the priorities we had set, we held a Supporting Children with a Social Worker conference in September. Dts and DSLs across primary and secondary came together, to hear about our new duties and share feedback about what support they needed in schools.

Priority 1

Make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and local authorities, including with children's social care, to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children.

Priority 2

Promote practice that supports children's engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting is an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm.

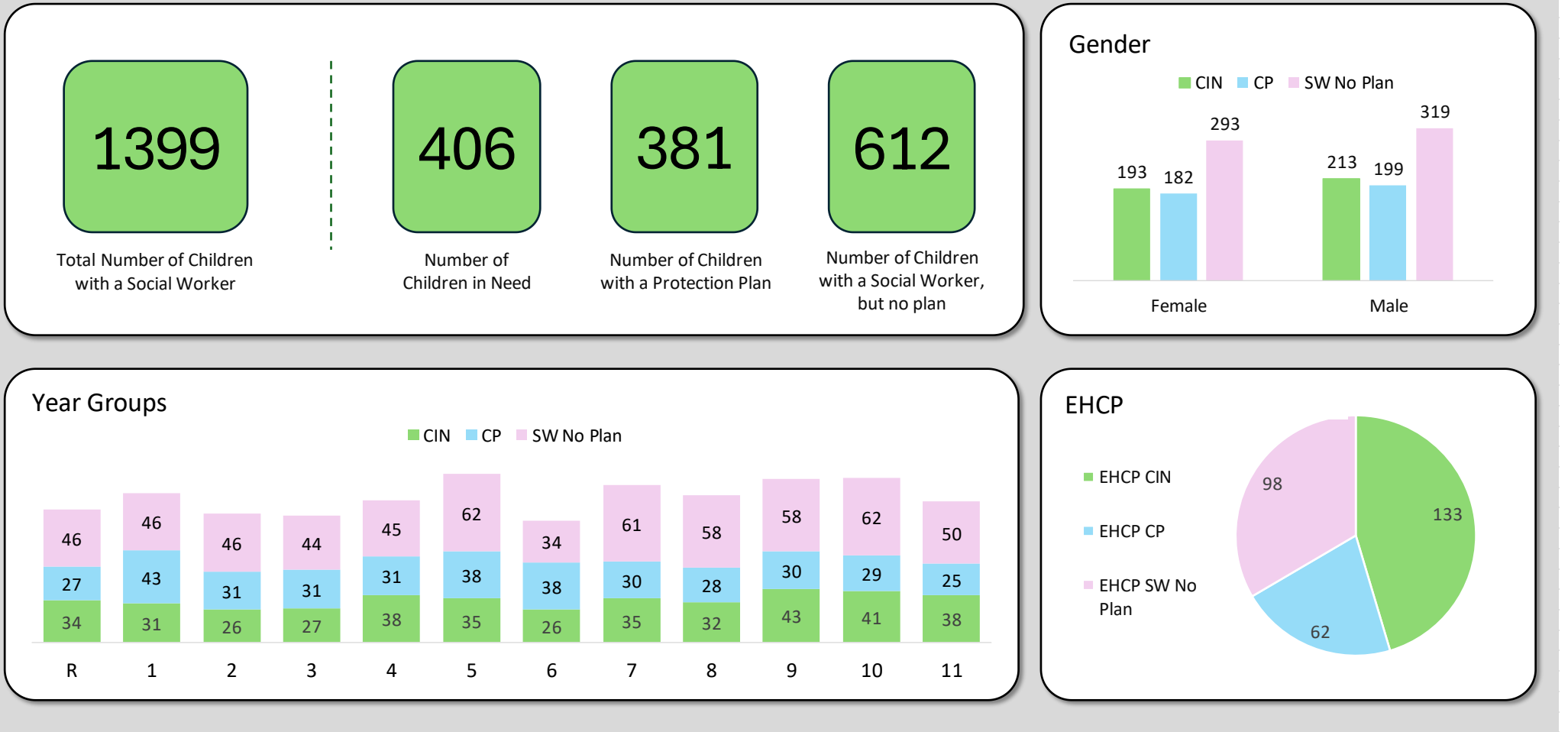
Priority 3

Narrow the attainment gap so every child has the opportunity to reach their potential – including helping to ensure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover educationally from the impact of the pandemic.

NB. This data fluctuates as children come on and off CIN and CP plans so is subject to change. We are now able to drill down to school level to look at suspensions and attendance per school, to support us in strategically identifying where to target our support.

Children with a Social Worker

(Not including Children Looked After)
As at 31 July 2025



Gender

CIN CP SW No Plan

193 182 293

213 199 319

Female Male

Year Groups

CIN CP SW No Plan

46 27 34 46 43 31 46 31 26 44 31 27 45 31 38 62 38 26 34 38 28 32 58 30 43 58 29 41 62 25 38 50

R 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

EHCP

EHCP CIN EHCP CP EHCP SW No Plan

133 62 98

Children with a Social Worker - Suspensions

(Not including Children Looked After)
As at 31 July 2025

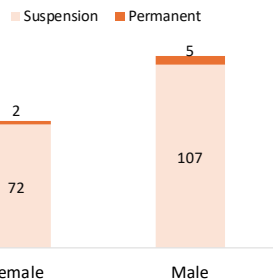
Number of pupils suspended



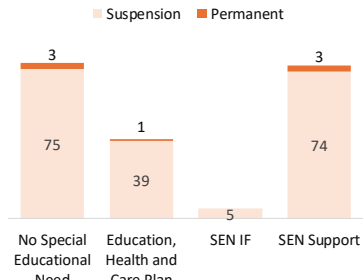
Number of days lost

1335.5

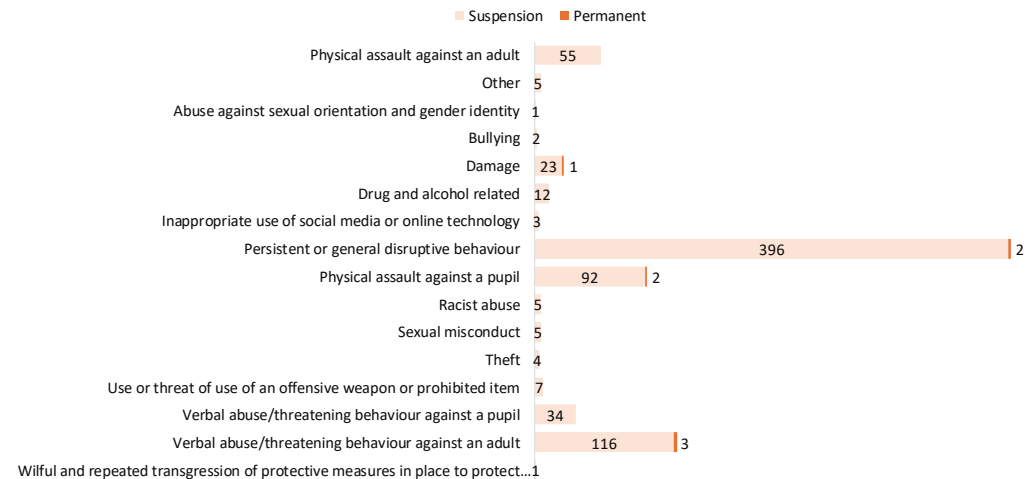
Gender



SEN



Reason for Suspension - includes primary reason plus any additional reasons



The Academic year started with visits to all the early help teams across Leicestershire to hear about their experiences of supporting children in education. The overwhelming feedback was that staff did not always feel confident in challenging schools and know how best to advocate for the families they are supporting.

As a result, we set up a 'surgery' for both social care and school staff to talk through education concerns. This has been well utilised by social care staff with 100% of users saying that the support and guidance they received was very helpful. We continue to embed this service into schools as the number of schools calling for guidance remains low, despite growing levels of suspensions for CwSW.

Social care staff also raised concern about their knowledge of the ever-changing education sector. We have put together a series of Bitesize videos for social care staff and families they are supporting on key topics of concern:

- Attendance

- Admissions
- Fair Access
- EHCP process
- Suspensions and Exclusions

A further course on Barriers to education in partnership with Autism Outreach and Inclusion will be completed in Autumn 2025. This will cover EBSA, persistent absence and severe absence with tools for CYP, parents and carers and Schools.

Suspensions and exclusions continue to be a significant concern for all children across Leicestershire. We have worked with BI to develop appropriate reporting and tracking of attendance, suspensions and exclusions. Working alongside Education Effectiveness we are supporting our 10 schools with areas of concern. This work will be developed in 25/26. The suspensions and exclusions guidance developed in partnership with LEPs has gone out, we continue to support schools to work through this.

Working with partners in the west Midlands we ran a pilot project with schools across the Hinckley area exploring how we could support the community of schools to develop trauma informed practice. We ran a series of workshops exploring what schools felt were the main issues they needed to overcome to help change practice and support children and young people. The main areas highlighted are further support for teaching staff to understand impact of trauma and support for SLT. Taking this feedback, we are developing our SLT relational practice course for 25/26.

Trauma Informed Schools Officer

This year we welcomed a trauma informed schools officer into the Virtual school, who had been working within public health to develop and support a group of schools with their trauma informed practice. Over the year the role has grown.

In September we held a Wellbeing Event for Senior Leaders with Minds Ahead which provided a reflective and supportive space offering strategies to maximise staff wellbeing. This was complemented by the launch of the Reflective Spaces pilot in collaboration with the Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service. This tool to encourage staff group supervision has since been reviewed and adapted incorporating the feedback from schools and we will be relaunching this September.

A collaboration with CFS Child Exploitation team to complete a powerful parent interview for the regional CE Awareness Day Conference took place. This presentation explored the critical link between school exclusion and exploitation, raising further awareness with schools and wider agencies. This led to additional presentations both online and in schools. Importantly, it also initiated the development of a parent/carers resource to support families who may be experiencing child exploitation.

Intensive work with Limehurst Academy supporting them towards completion of the ARC Matrix, has led to them becoming winners of the regional ARC award recognising their commitment to trauma informed and relational practice. Work included organisation of their annual Connecting Communities event and support to gain funding for the “Pathway to Prevention” project. This whole school and community initiative will be led by Restorative Practice and Consultancy and is designed to strengthen relationships, improve communication, attendance and reduce suspensions, anti-social behaviour, and crime. This model is being developed with sustainability in mind, involving staff, pupils, parents, and community leaders. They will also go on to be the first Leicestershire ARC Hub, sharing practice more widely with other schools next academic year.

Connecting Communities Event

Thursday 3rd April 5pm—7pm



Sports Hall
Bridge Street, Loughborough

Limehurst Academy, Public Health, People Zones, and the Violence Reduction Network are excited to host the second annual Connecting Communities event for young people, parents, and carers across Loughborough. This event offers families a wonderful opportunity to connect with local organisations and services, and to learn about the support available in the area.



By completing a restorative practice conference facilitator course, has enhanced the ability to support schools to use restorative approaches to support conflict and misunderstood behaviour.

Work also includes collaborating with colleagues across Education on projects including work to support parental engagement and improve attendance, engaging in setting-specific planning meetings with the Education Effectiveness team, providing tailored follow-up support and visits when needed.

A major milestone was leading the development of “Developing Relational Practice and Policy: A Guide for Leicestershire Schools”, which is now in its final stages and due for release in the Autumn term.

Throughout the year, the trauma informed schools officer supported 22 schools to complete the ARC audit, with several of them asking for more intensive support to focus on community links and relational practice.

As Co-Chair of the Trauma Informed Schools Network, this has allowed for collaboration and shared learning across the county. engagement in cross-regional research, liaising with schools outside Leicestershire to exchange ideas and adopt best practices in order to enrich our local approach and ensured that our work remains informed by broader developments in trauma-informed education.

Training

The VS has continued to deliver a wide range of training to schools and college staff, governors, social workers, carers and adoptive parents. We have over the year reviewed updated and added to our training portfolio.

The aim of the training is to help all professionals understand the needs of children in care and previously looked after children by identifying the barriers and strategies to support them.

Between September 2024 and August 2025, the VS offered and delivered training as follows:

- 54 Whole school Attachment and Trauma training sessions delivered to schools/mixed staff groups (2x one-hour sessions)
- Attachment and Trauma training to 1 Alternative provision and the leads of the Leicestershire SEIPS.
- 2 x Mop up Attachment and Trauma training sessions to new staff spring and summer term
- 4 x Attachment and Trauma training to Post 16 Colleges settings
- Induction Training for Designated Teachers of looked-after children and previously looked-after children- Autumn, Spring and Summer term
- DT Cluster sessions with a focus on the new extended duties and supporting Children with a social worker in the Autumn and Zones of Regulation in the Spring term.
- Intro to Virtual School and Emotion Coaching training to foster carers in Summer term
- Training to adopters of how to support children in school Autumn and Summer term
- Training to governors in Summer term
- AYSE intro to Virtual School Training Autumn and Spring term
- Attachment and trauma training for SW Autumn and Spring term
- 2x Early Years training to settings Autumn, Spring and Summer term
- 2x Training to Adopters, Autumn and Summer term
- 2x ASDAN Training to carers and PA and SW -Spring and Summer term
- Key Adult and Principles of Theraplay courses Secondary and Primary sessions - Autumn and Spring and Summer term
- Strategies for a positive transition to Secondary School (PLAC) Summer term
- Post 16 Choices and support for GCSEs for Foster Carers
- Transition to Primary School for Foster Carers Summer term
- Building attachments through play for Foster carers Summer term
- Principles of Theraplay training Autumn and Spring term.

Participants have made the following comments in response to the questions, “In what ways haven you benefited from this training and what will you do as a result of this session?”

I’ve never had training on this specific area. Speaker was very knowledgeable and told anecdotes

There has been lots of amazing content that helps to put things into practice. I personally have prior experience and psychology training so some of the content was new but it was excellent.

As an LSA we work on building relationships with the children to help support them in the best way for them. It has been brilliant to know that we are doing well as well as learning and extra knowledge and strategies.

Achievements and participation

Participation in the arts and sporting events is a huge part of our young people’s lives. It develops friendships, provides opportunities to experience things they may not have tried before and has a huge benefit in supporting wellbeing and mental health. The Virtual School are committed to providing as many opportunities as possible across a wide range of activities as possible to ensure all young people are given chance to engage in a variety of things.

Artsmark Journey

As a PLATINUM Artsmark award Virtual School, we are committed to continuing to embed our wider opportunities and an ethos that incorporates Arts and Culture for our young people’s lives. We continue our Arts journey and below share some of the wonderful opportunities our young people have experienced this academic year! The arts bring a sense of belonging, lifelong friendships and trusting relationships that enable our young people to feel safe and heard and to express themselves through different ways. For some of our young people this

opportunity has provided them with life enhancing opportunities and support.



**Artsmark
Platinum Award**
Awarded by Arts
Council England

'The Year of Belonging; Through the lens'

Secondary photography workshop

Thursday, 29th May saw the introduction of a Photography Workshop for our secondary age young people. A group of budding, young photographers were supported by a professional photographer, ably assisted by an artist, alongside members of the Virtual School, towards trying out skills linked to capturing images that meant something to them. The aim was then to show copies of the photos at a planned exhibition next year linked to a project around identifying an individual's sense of belonging.



A variety of materials were collected from the surrounding grounds of the venue at Beaumanor Hall by the young people and formed the composition of what turned out to be fantastic examples of their own artistry and imagination. Use of some chemicals in the overall development process reinforced the individuality of each person's collection of photographs and it was evident from their enthusiasm in seeking out possible subjects to photograph that this activity could possibly become more of a hobby for some of them in the future.

Thanks to the professionals for all of their hard work but most of all to the young people whose artistic flair shone through at every stage of the session. We cannot wait to see the photographs displayed in the exhibition later in the year.

Primary Photography Workshop

Thanks to Mighty Creatives, a small group of primary children enjoyed a couple of hours attending a photography workshop at Beaumanor Hall during the May half term break.



They all got involved and produced some amazing artwork with a limited amount of help. Some hard work went into the production of a nature picture using light sensitive paper and a working kaleidoscope with some wonderful designs produced.

Look out for the photos on the exhibition next year.

Theatre trips

This year we were able to offer tickets to a range of theatre trips. The shows our young people and their carers got to experience together were sell outs and a huge success. This year we got to see:

- The Gruffalo
- Adams Family
- Pig Heart Boy



ORCHESTRAS *Live*

Virtual school and Orchestra Live project

Collaborate and Innovate Action Research

This academic year we worked on an action research project funded through the Arts Council in partnership with Arts connect and The Mighty Creatives. Leicestershire Virtual school were partnered with Orchestra Live, to carry out research to the following questions:

Phase 1:

How can music organisations work with Virtual School teams to understand and overcome the challenges faced by UASC in accessing arts activities?

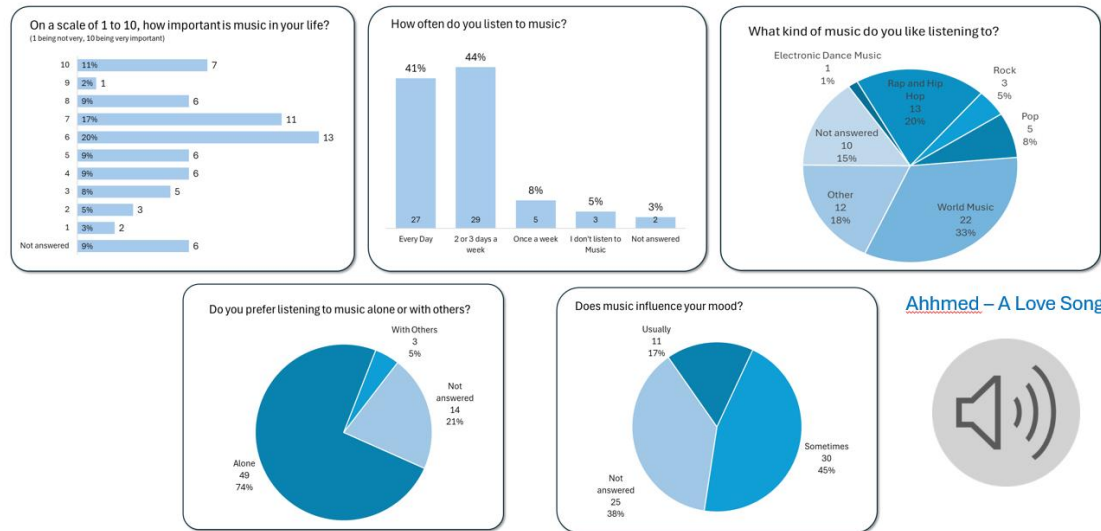
Phase 2:

To what extent can creative music approaches foster a sense of belonging for UASC?

Culture Sounds: A Space to be(long)?

Research Findings

Action-Research project conducted in partnership by Leicestershire Virtual School & Orchestras Live with mentoring and support from the University of Wolverhampton, Arts Connect and The Mighty Creatives.

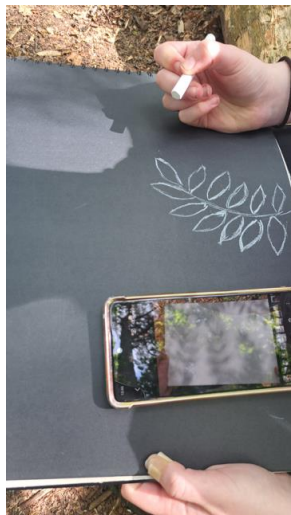
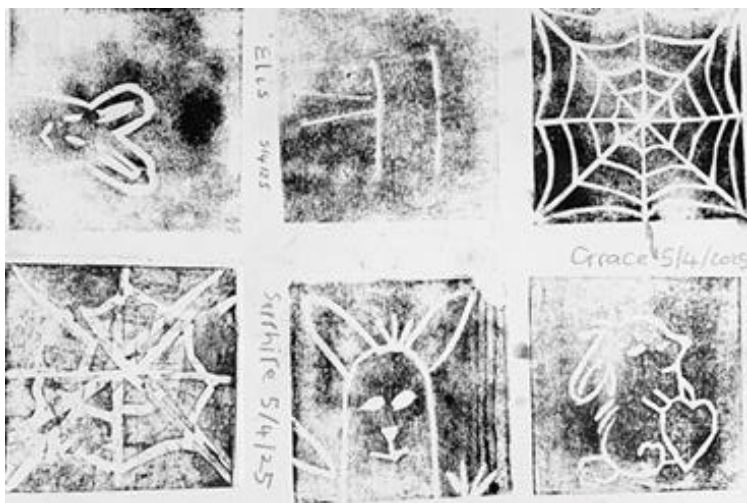


UASC presentation - Copy.pptx

[A copy of our final presentation can be found here.](#)

Forest Schools

Outdoor learning and being out in nature has huge benefits. It provides the opportunity to be creative and focus on wellbeing. The Virtual school has ran a forest school project across the year. We have had great engagement from our young people, alongside their carers, providing the opportunity to bond and build lasting relationships. We have trained one of our team as a forest school lead to support with the delivery of forest schools. In partnership with Leicester City and the Community, we have developed and offered a forest school session for those young people in residential care.



Power of the Arts Video

We worked in collaboration with The Mighty Creatives to produce a video showcasing the power of the arts through the voice of our young people. Take a watch here:

<https://youtu.be/49gX-tCiSx4>

Cricket event

After the success of our UASC cricket event last Summer our young people were offered 6 weeks of free training at the Leicester Caribbean Cricket Ground on Wednesday evenings in June and July. These sessions turned out to be a great success and it was brilliant seeing how well our young people not only engaged with the Leicestershire County Cricket staff and other coaches but also how encouraging and supportive they were of each other.

We were genuinely amazed at the ability on show from our young people.

Undoubted highlights included the appearance of Saqlain Mushtaq, a former international Pakistani cricketer, to give some bowling tips to our young people (see photo below of him with one of our participants) and the fact that some of our young people who did not have a cricket team before are now training with Leicester Caribbean Cricket Club and will hopefully soon to be playing in some games with them in one of their teams.

Many, many thanks must go to both Leicestershire County and Caribbean Cricket Clubs for offering their services for free and enabling some of our young people to participate in this sport that they love so much, along with the UASC Virtual School team who organised and supported the events.



Sports festival

Even the scorching 27-degree weather couldn't put off the 19 young people who attended the Sports Festival at Loughborough University on June 19th. The event organised by Active Together was again jam packed with noncompetitive sporting activities. Once our All Stars were kitted out with their T-shirts, drawstring bag and of course a water bottle, we were ready to compete!

Active Together state, "over the course of the last year, Active Together have begun to work with the Leicestershire Virtual School to develop the sporting provision for children in care. Active Together are committed to continuing to develop this relationship with the Virtual School to ensure the sustainability of opportunities for this group of young people in the future."

The event began with the usual opening ceremony where we all limbered up to some banging tunes and a Zumba session. As the weather was so warm we headed inside to the Tennis Centre, our venue for the day. Laid out were the day's activities which included seated Volleyball, Wheelchair Basketball, Archery and Bowling. Wheelchair Basketball was amazing with school staff taking part too. Active Together even offered to bring the activity into local schools!

Again, this year the team doubled in size, which is amazing, one young person even commenting that they had waited all year for the email to come through. We encourage all carers to come along and support their young person. This is truly a great event, and we get young people returning every year.



Youth sport trust

This year we partnered with the YST to deliver bespoke trauma informed training to all of their Athlete mentors across the country. We have delivered across all regions to ensure all athlete mentors working in schools have the basic understanding of Attachment and trauma informed awareness so that they can best support the young people they work with.



One of our young people has been awarded the young changemaker of the year award through the Youth sport trust, recognising the biggest turn around through support. We are incredibly proud of this young person and this achievement!

Care to Dance



This academic year we have continued with our partnership with Care to Dance where our young people have gained dance qualifications, participated at events and celebrations and expanded the programme through pupil voice to enhance the offer of dance. We were even recognised through the Pearson National Teaching Awards for our partnership working and the impact we have for our young people. We have several of our young people also taking part in the intensive training programme, looking to bridge that gap between Care to Dance and mainstream dance opportunities. Please see attached report.



Link to the young person's voice video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hq9vR50m1Zk>

Impact report for intensive pilot programme



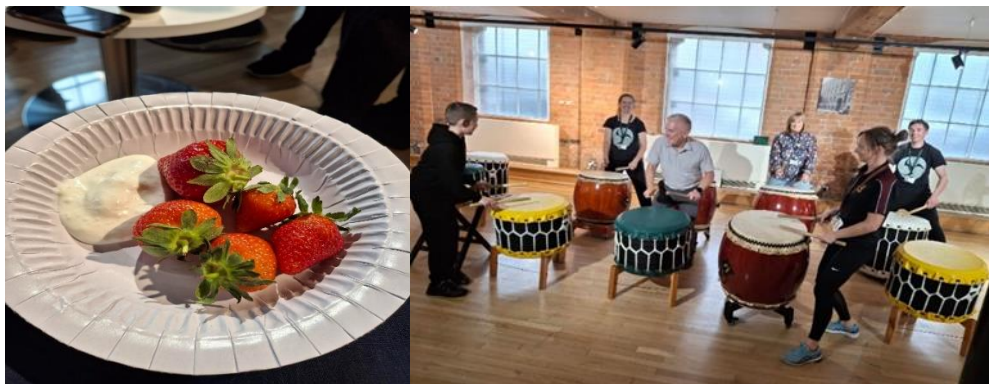
Year 6 Taiko Drumming Project

Who knew that drumming could be so much fun?

Bullfrog Arts, headed up by Juliet, Jake and Rory ran two sessions for Y6s to help with their transition to secondary school.

We didn't know what to expect when we arrived at the Hinckley Atkins Building. But after a warm-up game of giant Jenga, which the children loved, we were led to our drums. Such an assortment of drums of different shapes and sizes, all of which we got to try. After hearing a bit of background information on how to hold our sticks (bachi), we picked up some Japanese words to follow instructions and followed some simple rhythms. We played a few 'call and response' rounds to build confidence and then we were making up our own rhythms for the rest of the group to follow as well as a few challenges which had the school staff concentrating just as much as the children. We even watched an amazing performance by Kate during one session.

During the break, a basket full of different fruits was presented and the children enjoyed trying new ones. Strawberries and cream went down very well. The amazing leaders asked us some questions about drumming and the fruit and gave us some background information on Taiko, which gave everyone a chance to get to know each other a bit. After the welcome break, we were back on the drums, this time moving quickly from one drum to another and playing one of two rhythms depending on which side we were on. The highlight at the end of the two sessions I think for the children was the performance to our 'pretend' audience and the bow we took. Everyone left feeling more confident and eager to try more Taiko and we were all given a lovely t-shirt to keep. Some of the children were pleased to hear that Bullfrog Arts will be coming into their new schools next year so they can build on their Taiko skills.



Staff involvement



Circle of Adults training Music research project The impact of the ARTs nationally Training with NAVSH The stepping forward Arts programme launch

The Virtual school love to get involved in participation, meeting and supporting our young people and attending training events to deepen our knowledge. Here are some of the events we have taken part in this academic year.

Careers fair

We ran another careers fair this year, that turned out bigger and better than the last. Lots of our young people turned up to speak to various colleges, employers and support offers.



SYPAC

SYPAC (Supporting Young People After Care) is a monthly social meet up for care leavers. The young people get consistent staff, engage with each other in games and activities, input into council business and policy and can access EET opportunities and advice through myself and other visitors who attend meeting throughout the year. There are regular young people who come and have been doing so for many years which means that there is no upper age limit, and we have members beyond 25yrs who find the monthly sessions incredibly valuable and important. The sessions help to alleviate loneliness particularly for those young people who are living independently. By ensuring the VS have input there have been many opportunities to encourage and advise young people to engage in education, employment, and training. For example, one young person remains at college and is aiming to achieve her English and Maths at Level 2 post 25, greatly improving her employment opportunities. Another young person has agreed to come to a pre-employment programme in the hope of working towards an apprenticeship in the future and after attending this has not only signed up to attend adult education and further study English and Maths but is also undertaking work experience. There are also 2 young people who took part in an NHS employability programme successfully and have started a period of work experience through this. The membership of the group evolves regularly, and young people get to share experiences and friendships that last and support each other.

Leicester City in the Community



We have been working with Leicester City in the Community again over the last academic year to offer additional mentoring and support for some of our young people. Over the last 2 years, we have supported 20 young people through the mentoring offer. Mentors support young people in our schools and offer a wide range of extracurricular opportunities for our young people in care. Alongside this, they offer enrichment activities, in which 36 young people engaged in. 27 of our young people then went on to other pathways including camps and kicks. As part of our offer, we were able to offer match day tickets to our young people throughout the season and some even got the opportunity to be a flag bearer! 8 young people with their Carer got to attend throughout the year to premier league men’s matches, as well as a group of 20 young people attending the Women’s game.

Enrichment

Month	Enrichment	YP Attended
June 2023	Seagrave Training Down Visit	15
August 2023	Gulliver's Land Theme Park	1
	Curve Theatre	1
	Bowling	2
	Activity Day at King Power	2
January 2024	DMH Panto	1
February 2024	Leicester Riders Basketball Match	4
March 2024	Activity Day at King Power	1
April 2024	West Midlands Safari Park	1
May 2024	Residential	1
June 2024	Seagrave Training Ground Visit	5
July 2024	Residential	1
August 2024	Transition Camp	2
	Ninja Warrior	2
October 2024	Alton Towers	1
November 2024	E-sports and Movie Night	1
December 2024	Wellbeing Event	1
February 2025	Skate Camp, Go Karting, Graffiti Workshop and Residential	TBC

Book Parcels

2045 books have been sent out by the Dolly Parton Imagination Library scheme on our behalf to children in care aged 0 to 5. 979 books have been sent out by the Virtual School to the primary school aged pupils.



We have been incredibly proud of our book clubs which have been in place since 2007! We recognise how important children's reading skills to access learning across the curriculum is. We know how much our children have enjoyed receiving the monthly parcels over the years. Last year due to budgets we had to cease our Letterbox packages, but we continued to ensure children from reception to year 6 received a bimonthly parcel. It is with real sadness that we have now had to stop the parcels for our Primary aged children. This is due to a staff member leaving and tight budgets. The increase in the number of children in care, along with the increased cost of providing high quality parcels to every child has increased year on year. We are encouraging schools to subscribe to letterbox using the PPP so children can still receive book parcels.

We are delighted that the Dolly Parton Imagination Library are still providing books to all looked-after children aged 0 – 5 years.

I like the books we get because they are fun to read

They give me a lot of books - I find the books interesting. Dottie Detective are my favourites - I've got all of the series.

Reading them, learning new things

Loves getting a parcel and they are cool because you get to read them.

I get to read books that I've never read before.

Plans for 2025/2026

Care to Dance

We are delighted to share that we are running the Care to Dance programme for another full year starting in September, after the success of our last three 12-month programmes. This is an exciting opportunity for our young people to continue this journey, with the added option of completing their dance leadership award as part of the programme and take dance to the next level with our new additional programme running alongside the core offer.

Leadership training development

We have developed a new leadership training offer for Head teachers and senior leaders, to support them in embedding a trauma informed ethos and culture across their schools. This will be rolled out from September.

Year of belonging; through the lens

Next academic year we will conclude our project with a photography exhibition at the Highcross in the Autumn term, along with a photo album to showcase all our young people photography.

Theatre partnership with Curve and Leicester City Virtual School

We are joining up Leicester City Virtual School and booking our private production for Christmas! Watch this space...

Careers event

We are busy planning our next Careers event at the King Power Stadium and hope to have a range of providers and business' who will attend to share their expertise, offer and jobs for our young people.

Coram Shakespeare pilot

We are working in partnership with Coram Shakespeare to launch a pilot project with e Multi Academy trust, engaging young people in drama. More details in the new academic year.

Germany Arts exchange

We are taking part in our first ever residential abroad! Some of our young people will be going to Germany on an Arts and Culture exchange!

[2025-2026 priorities/ action plan](#)

The VS Service Delivery Plan reflects the ambitions and ethos of the Children and Family Service Departmental plan. The priorities and actions underpinning them are under constant review throughout the year. We aim

- i. To raise the aspirations of and for looked-after children (LAC) and previously looked-after children (PLAC)
- ii. To narrow progress and attainment gaps
- iii. To improve stakeholders' understanding of the educational needs of children in care and those adopted from care and strengthen their support of education
- iv. To ensure the views of children and young people are heard, recorded, and inform decisions regarding their education.
- v. To maintain a resilient, vibrant, informed, and knowledgeable team
- vi. To work strategically to improve outcomes and support for all children with a social worker

National developments in the education landscape will always have implications for virtual schools and their support for vulnerable children. Amongst these are the development of PPP funding for post-16, the SEN Review, social care reforms and the Childrens Wellbeing bill.

Donna Chapman
Virtual School Head,
Leicestershire Virtual School,
Children and Family Services,
Leicestershire County Council.

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